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Teaching While Lesbian and Other Identities: Sexual Diversity, Race, and Institutionalized Practices Through an Autoethnographic Lens

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TEACHING WHILE LESBIAN AND OTHER IDENTITIES:
SEXUAL DIVERSITY, RACE, AND INSTITUTIONALIZED PRACTICES
THROUGH AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC LENS

by
Sondra S. Briggs

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Education

In

Teacher Leadership for Learning

Inclusive Education

In the

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Kennesaw State University

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2015

To my mother, Mimi Rosenfeld ~

Thank you for always lighting the way and for asking, “Is it what you love?”

Wrapped in your womanhood, your wisdom, your vulnerability I learned of the fierceness and fragility of the human spirit. I came to know through the depth of your courage how to stand in my own truth. Your mothering, Mama, was transcendent.

You shall forever exist for me in the gypsy dance that was your life.

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And then there is Alister (a.k.a. *Ali-cat*): sweetness and intensity, prowess and perception, reminding me each day of the interwoven wonder of all things living. Your feline capers, soulful purrs and devoted companionship have carried me, smiling, to the end of this venture.

ABSTRACT

TEACHING WHILE LESBIAN AND OTHER IDENTITIES: SEXUAL DIVERSITY, RACE, AND INSTITUTIONALIZED PRACTICES THROUGH AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC LENS

by

Sondra S. Briggs

The implicit acceptance among educators and in institutions of learning that discussions around LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) issues are off limits perpetuates the marginalization of these identities and those who inhabit them. In K-12 schools and college classrooms the prevailing silence sends disturbing messages about the treatment of adults and children when their sexual orientation fails to fit neatly into prescribed binary classifications. As one who has been silent as well as silenced, I understand this dichotomy from a unique perspective. Moreover, my lived membership within diverse cultural and racial groups that have been routinely marginalized through institutionalized practices in educational and social contexts provides a complex lens with which to examine and complicate notions of heteronormativity, identity, and Otherness. As proposed by Ellis (2009a), using an autoethnographic approach as the qualitative method for this study positions me “at the intersection of the personal and the cultural, thinking and observing as an ethnographer and writing and describing as a storyteller” (p. 13). This methodology opens avenues for the reader to interact with the narrative authentically, reimagining and reconstructing more inclusive worlds along with the researcher and the participant who are inextricably linked.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“Telling the truth almost always breaks unspoken laws, the solidarity expected from members of that group, whether it be a family or a larger community.”¹

– Judith Barrington, *Writing the Memoir: From Truth to Art* (1997, p. 69)

Vignette 1: *Summer 2011*

I am seated in a classroom with eighteen other educators taking the final course toward a post-graduate degree. We are part of a number of Inclusive Education and other cohorts, employed in close to a dozen counties in and around Metro Atlanta, in all facets of the public school system. Teachers of language learners and those for special needs students; speech therapists and a teacher for the hearing impaired; one high school dropout intervention specialist, school administrators, and even county level supervisors. For me, it is the last in a series of classes that focuses on culturally responsive pedagogy. This course calls for us to immerse ourselves in a novel, and potentially uncomfortable, cultural experience. These closing weeks are devoted to presentations on the event in which we’ve engaged, and discussions centering on the impact it had on our thinking or behavior.

The first teacher to volunteer is farther along in her studies than the rest of us: she’s already in the doctoral program. She tells of her interest in experiencing authentic Latin dancing in “one of those restaurants with a dance floor.” She was not expecting there’d be so few patrons at the establishment she’s chosen to attend with her husband. A complete novice, she had been counting on being able to copy some dance moves or, at the very least, disappearing into the

¹ From *Writing the Memoir: From Truth to Art*, by Judith Barrington, 1997, New York: The Eighth Mountain Press.

anticipated crowd of dancers. Instead, she is faced with the dismal possibility of no luck on either front. Her husband's self-consciousness about dancing in public is an additional (and frustrating) obstacle; however, she is determined to go through with her assignment. The teacher then makes mention of two other couples that are seated at a nearby table, and notes they are Spanish speakers; not even they are dancing. She wishes she had chosen a different venue for this task, or maybe just not a weeknight. A short while later the teacher notices that one of the women from the other table has moved to the middle of the floor and is dancing solo. Soon, that same woman approaches *her* table, hand extended in a gesture that says, "Let's dance." Here in the story the teacher pauses for effect (her reply is all about timing), adjusts the corners of her mouth, and delivers the punch line (making certain that the verb is spoken with two distinct syllables): "Sorry, but I don't *swing* like that." As if on cue, the class erupts into laughter. Surveying the room of giddy expressions, it appears that I may be the only one present who hasn't cracked a smile. Or maybe it only feels that way as the room quickly shrinks.

A familiar momentary urge makes me want to rise and declare my membership in the rainbow-colored ranks of the lesbian community. Equally familiar are my inner screams—from the academic: *your unexamined biases in the diverse classroom reinforce the cultural deficit model of teaching!* From the enraged onlooker: *You need to know that your glaring ignorance is hurting my eyes!* From the emerging social justice advocate: *You need to know and care to know that the person next to whom you are seated may be offended by your thoughtless words because that person identifies as LGBTQQIA² or a well-loved family member does or they have a same-sex partner or a transgender colleague or they have two moms or two dads or they're not merely but significantly an ally! You need to know and yes even care and you need to strongly consider*

² Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, ally – from Georgia Safe Schools Coalition (GSSC). Retrieved from <http://www.georgiasafeschoolscoalition.org/>

these stark if sometimes hidden realities before your very eyes before you allow such utterances to escape from your mouth or—maybe, one day—to even enter your mind. But each of these screams is promptly quashed by my diplomatically-placed censorship and predictable justification for remaining mum.

People receive the knowledge they need when they're ready to receive it, and if they're lucky enough, or at least listening. And then, maybe they don't. Either way, I am certain that my personal disclosure of some aspect of my identity in a purely reactionary moment will serve no purpose in the greater scheme of shifting ideas and furthering causes. So I sit, silently stunned, and wonder: How is it that a graduate level teacher education program so centrally focused on inclusiveness could overlook the inclusion of discourse around LGBT³ issues? This event precipitated the epiphanic moment that would ultimately lead me to the focus of this dissertation. Or so I thought.

Preliminary Discussion

It would be a long time before I realized how a study I had completed one year earlier had impacted not only my emotions but also my critical consciousness around the events of that day. In fact, the focus of that earlier piece was one of my former middle school students who, before becoming a junior in high school, came out to me as gay. I had begun to view that study as the pilot upon which I would base my terminal work; it was my intention to lay the foundation for broader research that might help generate urgency around the need for all educators to build cultural proficiency and a culture of advocacy around LGBT issues in schools and classrooms. My larger intent was to argue for the inclusion of LGBT studies and sensitivity training within teacher education programs—particularly with respect to students who continue to be tragically

³ Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender; further defined in the Definition of Terms section.

impacted by the abject lack of inclusiveness that exists in all levels of educational institutions. But by focusing on LGBT teachers and *their* experiences in public education, I could give voice to the state of schools as relates to overall LGBT support systems; the interactions among and between administrators, teachers, and students; and the kinds of explicit and often damaging implicit discourse around LGBT topics taking place in classrooms, faculty meetings, and teachers lounges.

While the intentions around what might have been a different study have not changed in any respect, this current study examines a much more personal set of data—my own. I achieve this by centrally locating the researcher (myself) into the study, an essential characteristic of autoethnographic methodology. Autoethnography, thereby, makes use of what Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) term “tenets of autobiography and ethnography” (pg. 1) to lay bare both personal and social truths. Here, the stories are the study, and vice versa. As a result, the researcher as well as the reader is provided with significant opportunities for discovery and the potential for transformation as they experience the interconnectedness between “process and product” (Ellis et al., p. 1) and the inevitable interchange of our human stories.

Statement of the Problem

What occurred in that classroom was a fertile moment for rich discourse if only anyone had been sufficiently prepared; certainly, I was not. Neither the language nor its frame was accessible to me: the railing utterances inside my head were nowhere near ready for primetime. And for a long time afterward, I lay full ‘blame’ for what had happened—the laughter amongst my classmates and their seeming lack of cognition or lack of recognition of wrongdoing—at the feet of the very educators who were present. Did no one notice what was awry in that punch line

or in the presenter's bizarre response to the simplest and friendliest of gestures? Was there no awareness of the unfounded assumptions, the complex levels of homophobia, the absence of any hint of feminism (not to mention humanity) in a classroom that was, unsurprisingly, overwhelmingly female-gendered? For there to have been some recognition of these facts and to feel the discomfort in that moment may have required that the onlooker be outside of the sphere of heteronormative⁴ entrenchment—a given reality in so many public schools in the South and throughout the nation⁵—that was so visibly embedded in my university classroom that day.

For sometimes upwards of eight hours a day we, as educators, are the primary role models for the students in our charge. As they learn to be part of a community of critical thinkers and learners, how to be engaged and engaging citizens in our rapidly shrinking world, what is the narrative being passed along when harmful biases happen to bleed through everyday instruction? Is it that some are more entitled to fair treatment than others? Or that Otherness⁶, in general, should be less tolerated? Perhaps it is that tolerance, with respect to certain communities, should be withheld altogether. Social justice is a tenet woven throughout our general education curriculum as early as the primary grades. In what context is this notion being taught when teachers with dozens of years of collective experience—who are seeking advanced degrees in areas of education focusing on inclusion—find such humor in what amounted to nothing short of an insensitive homophobic joke by one of their own?

I thought about colleagues of mine who self-identified as gay, lesbian, and/or queer; among them, a few (in California, in the late 90s) had chosen to be “out” in their school setting despite a lack of full acceptance. I recalled students from kindergarten through twelfth grade

⁴ This term is defined in the Definition of Terms section.

⁵ In GLSEN 2013 National School Climate Survey.

⁶ The terms “Otherness” and “the Other” are defined in the Definition of Terms section. I have capitalized these terms in order to provide consistency across the use of all terminology relative to identity in this study.

with whom I had interacted in my years of teaching on both coasts; these students' performances of gender were evidently outside of the standard binary classifications society holds for girls and boys. I wondered how many of them had faced school every day feeling singularly different while facing a teacher who was just like them, and just as afraid or uncomfortable; a teacher who—but for the real or imagined fear, judgment, and reprisal—might have been their greatest ally.

Cooper (2008) states, “there is a deafening silence in families, in education and in communities” (p. 427) around this subject matter. To be sure, it is a topic that I have found is disturbingly *undiscussable* among educators in Georgia, from grade school to the university level. In fact, the silence that is characteristically employed when it comes to LGBT topics in schools is not unlike that which prevails around race. That particular “silence” has a name: color-blindness, the denial of personal racial bias by Whites, as well as their denial or lack of acknowledgment of the racial experiences of people of color (Sue & Sue, 2008). This widespread and misappropriated condonation of racism is especially prevalent among teachers⁷ (Cushner, McClelland & Safford, 2006; Singleton & Linton, 2006) and contributes significantly to forces in education that work against social justice in general and, on a more personal and immediate level—for teachers and students alike, one's ability to rely on school as a place of safety and inclusiveness. While these may appear to be a conflation of two seemingly discrete constructs—sexual identity and race—both notions are well situated in the category of Otherness when viewed through the lens of institutionalized educational practice.

⁷ Bennett's DMIS (developmental model of intercultural sensitivity) offers a graphic representation of cultural awareness that occurs on a six-stage continuum from ethnocentric to ethnorelative. The contention by Mahon (as cited in Cushner, McClelland & Safford, 2006) is that most teachers are at the phase called minimization (the final phase of ethnocentricity prior to moving to the more culturally proficient stage of ethnorelativity). A similar model, the Cultural Proficiency Continuum (in Love, Stiles, Mundry & DiRanna, 2008), offers a framework for responses to diversity. My study makes reference to both models.

The act of silence plays an important role in the notion of Otherness, as well as in the persistent heteronormative profile of P-12 schools and institutions of higher learning. Silence is not complacency when teachers and administrators choose the strategy of non-engagement to ignore, turn away from, and reject difference and diversity and its concomitant discourse on the basis of unexamined bias. Silence, in this case, is an active choice that translates into complicity.

Statement of Purpose

While substantive language—albeit, continually evolving—does exist for use in dialogue about Otherness, the normative institutions under which our society operates have rarely deemed such conversations as warranted. When I came out to my forward-thinking administrators at my suburban Atlanta elementary school—at the conceivable but unlikely risk of losing my job—my admission was prompted by my overwhelming sense of frustration with behaviors from some of my colleagues: my seemingly routine experience with thinly veiled manifestations of bigotry in the form of microaggressions had reached a boiling point. As one of only four teachers of color among a dominant culture staff that numbered in the multiple dozens, and the only teacher of English language learners (a student population with year over year growth), my mere mention of a word like “diversity” at a team meeting would be met with demeaning remarks by those who claimed colorblindness (as if it were a badge of honor), and snickering whispers or sighs of exasperation from those who lacked the language to engage in meaningful public discourse, appropriate or otherwise.

Why, despite sweeping legalization of same-sex marriage in three dozen states by spring of 2015 (Freedom to Marry, 2015), and the executive order by Obama protecting gender identity and sexual orientation for federal workers (“Remarks by the President,” 2014), are educators

nationwide still overwhelmingly closeted? Why, upon the fiftieth anniversary of the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, are there ever-increasing numbers of Black and Brown boys being tracked into special education programs (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Milner, 2012; Noguera & Wing, 2006)? And why, almost two decades into the 21st century, do so many White teachers continue to embrace the notion of colorblindness?

While no amount of legislation can dictate beliefs or behavior, we must begin to learn ways to use the language and understandings that *do* exist to articulate the contradictions and imbalances that are present and unaccounted for in the institutions we rely on most. The gaping hole where dialogue should be continues to fuel intolerance and injustice—often in the form of tiny annihilations that occur daily and are virtually invisible (but to those who are the intended or unintended victims)—in every part of our society. Using elements of autoethnography⁸ as a tool to reflect upon, reveal and investigate my personal experience, I want to spotlight the dangerous silences that prevail around LGBT and racial contexts in academic and social institutions, K-12 and beyond. In so doing, I hope to disrupt and complicate the institutionalized and implicit practices that serve to reify those silences.

A principal purpose for this dissertation is to shed light on how my own ways of identifying—in cultural, racial, and social contexts—and my resultant biases have shaped my worldview and informed my pedagogy, particularly with respect to marginalization.

Research Questions

In the years since my pilot study, I have returned repeatedly to a single set of questions: How different might his middle school experience have been had my eighth grade student had an

⁸ This term is discussed later in this chapter under the section, *Conceptual/Methodological Framework*; see an extended discussion in Chapter II under *Autoethnography and Reflexivity*.

awareness of me as an ally? And equally important: Had I felt safe enough or empowered enough to generate discourse about LGBT issues in the middle school where I taught, could those conversations have contributed to a healthier climate overall? My reflections around these largely rhetorical queries compelled me to consider the broader issues that provoked those questions in the first place – the forces that allow exclusionary and harmful practices to exist in schools and remain largely unchecked. Although school should be a safe place of learning and growth for students and teachers alike, that is clearly not always the case. The fact is schools reflect the larger foundation of our society in which thrive “institutional structures that affirm it is fine to use power to reinforce and maintain coercive hierarchies” (hooks, 1994, p. 188). Coming face to face with a society and culture predicated on a system of social injustice and economic inequality at an early age, I began to comprehend what I was experiencing from an emotional affective stance long before I developed the necessary cognitive skills and critical dispositions for understanding my experience.

The questions that guide this work have been formulated to uncover meaning; this process has undergone a number of reformulations over the course of this study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). As an educator navigating my experience through a dialectical lens I stand well positioned to recognize and interrogate the structural biases that work against educational equity. As an autoethnographic researcher whose identities are reflected through fluid intersectionality, my unique perspective allows me to investigate and complicate notions of heteronormativity, identity, and Otherness within an overall context of social justice. The following questions guide this work:

1. In what ways have I felt silenced, excluded, and/or privileged based on perceived Otherness?

This initial question is an overarching one, and it is woven throughout the study.

2. How has my pedagogy shaped and been shaped by the intersectional spaces I occupy?
3. How can my personal narrative help further change agency in a way that fosters more inclusive spaces for LGBT and other marginalized educators?

Significance of the Study

I come to this study with the knowledge that my experience with Otherness in and outside of sites of learning has helped to create the pedagogical framework upon which I rely to create access to spaces for meaningful expression. The shedding of light upon my own ways of identifying is born out of a commitment to reflexivity—a term not to be confused with reflection. Reflexivity (discussed further in Chapter II) is essential to understanding our experiences as socially constructed, a view that supports our engagement with our social world and the kinds of practices that can lead to critical change. Importantly, reflexivity is also a teachable skill; practitioners can acquire the tools that lead to uncovering assumptive reflexes, and learn how intentional *self*-consciousness and outside dialogue can lead to meaningful social action (Cunliffe, 2004; Johnson, 2009). I will elaborate on this in the following chapter.

An ACLU Special Report that utilizes extensive nationwide sources exemplifies accounts of racial profiling commonly referred to as DWB, or driving while Black. This term refers to the widely documented and pervasive problem of racially motivated, pretextual traffic stops that predominantly Black and Latino/Latina citizens are subjected to (Harris, 1999). Driving while Black, of course, parodies DWI, or driving while intoxicated—the *actual* crime. DWB is a painful reality for those being profiled, and a powerful commentary on the structural racism experienced by those who are often deemed as Other. Similarly situated acronyms have become

popular shorthand for expressing instances of intolerance or injustice experienced predominately by those who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD). Such acronyms—including those spelled out below—serve to push back upon and interrogate our society’s widely accepted cultural stereotypes. Dawkins (2010) provides startling statistics for three highly profiled groups ‘caught in the act’ of Driving While Black, Flying While Arab, and Walking While Latino (in Arizona, after the passage of that state’s controversial SB 1070 immigration law in April 2010). Dawkins points to a Gallup poll in which a majority of White respondents denied that excessive profiling targeting certain groups was taking place; at the same time, they felt that “race, ethnicity and overall appearance” were factors that ought to be considered when passenger searches occur at airports.

I have chosen to use Teaching While Lesbian as the opening phrase for the title of this work because of my stance on the unspoken imposition on LGBT teachers to be closeted; it is an implicit form of discrimination imposed by educational systems and state-sanctioned legislation. Naming a practice of discrimination where it lives exposes it for what it is—in this case, a strategy for social stratification that is used as a tool to perpetuate LGBT marginalization.

The riskiness of placing the words ‘teaching’ and ‘lesbian’ within the same phrase is a reality that does not escape me. I am aware that it goes well beyond the realm of comfort for many people; among them, very likely, the majority of my colleagues. Pellicer (2008) contends that pursuing anything worthwhile will involve significant risk, not unlike trapeze-jumping. Using the words I have chosen to entitle my piece feels like a decision fraught with risk—like stepping out on a far-flung tree limb. The facts are: I am still employed in my school system in a suburb of Atlanta; I am determined to continue my career in education for some years to come;

and I can count on less than one hand the number of people in my district who, with certainty (because I came out to them), know of my sexual orientation.

In the policies on student conduct for the school district where I am employed, it is commendable that the language pertaining to student harassment has evolved over the past few years. The Student Code of Conduct (JCDA-R) for elementary, middle, and high schools currently uses appropriate protective language to define *harassment*: “includes but is not limited to, harassment, intimidation or abuse of students or others based on actual or perceived race, creed, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity or a physical characteristic” (Rule L). While the meaning of diversity in education may have expanded in certain respects in recent years to become more inclusive of LGBT student populations, it has made little impact on the extension of protections or the most basic collegial acceptance for educators who choose to practice outside of the boundaries of the closet. Since sexual orientation is not a protected class for educators (or any school employees) in the state of Georgia, the District Administrative Rule for Equal Opportunity Employment states explicitly in the rationale/objective section: “The District will not tolerate harassment, discrimination or retaliation against any employee based upon legally-protected status.”

I have certainly told the truth about my life in the past, so being out on a limb is not necessarily a setting with which I am unfamiliar. But I have never done so in so public a manner as this. That limb on which I often find myself has been in some ways a regular theme in my life, and one with which I feel significant familiarity. In most instances, it feels less precarious than straddling fences for the mere sake of safety. So, although there may very well be some level of risk associated with this writing, I feel only clarity about this path I have chosen to walk. When she describes the important work of telling our stories, memoirist Judith Barrington (1997)

asserts, “For members of marginalized groups, speaking personally and truthfully about our lives plays a small part in erasing years of invisibility and interpretation by others” (p. 14). My commitment to using an autoethnographic approach to tell this story is about doing this process in the full light of authenticity.

My own story is the one I know best. Although it is uniquely subjective, it is also fundamentally connected to a vast catalog of like narratives for the mere fact that we are each linked by our humanity. For this reason, readers will be able to glimpse facets of truth that are reflected in their immediate experience. My hope is that this recognition will spark deeper understandings that are on a dynamic continuum, involving belief systems and action.

This study can add to the broader research that is generating urgency around the need for educational systems and institutions of learning to build capacity for cultural proficiency and a culture of advocacy for those who have been marginalized: educators and students whose identities have been ignored, stereotyped, and actively spurned; and for those whose voices have been hushed and excluded from relevant conversations. This dissertation aims to disrupt the prevailing attitudes that prevent discourse about race and sexuality from having a valued place in the P-12 classroom and beyond; such attitudes devalue vast swaths of our richly diverse and vibrant population. Messages of deficiency and intolerance—implicit and explicit—attached to notions of Otherness cannot continue to be reified.

Definition of Terms

This list of terms has been provided in order to establish an understanding of the

terminology in this study that is consistent with its intent. The definitions reflect the themes and overall purpose for this study. Terms have been placed in alphabetical order to provide the greatest accessibility for the reader.

Biracial/Multiracial. Individuals of mixed heritage: identifying with or belonging to more than one racial group. Until the 2000 census, like many who identify as biracial or multiracial, I was forced to choose a single racial identity on forms that collect demographic data (i.e., school and job applications). Biracial/multiracial individuals often are subject to a monoracial identity imposed on them by society (Sue & Sue, 2008).

Capital (cultural, social). Based on the theoretical ideas extended by Bourdieu (1986) around these largely symbolic forms of capital. Cultural capital, in particular, is said to be “embodied capital” or part of one’s integral self (a person’s habitus). Social capital has more to do with one’s network of resources, which can include institutionalized (e.g., educational) relationships.

Closet. The virtual hiding place for those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. One is said to be *closeted* or *in the closet* when hiding LGBT identity, and *out of the closet* or *out* when that identity is revealed to oneself/others (Biegel, 2010).

Coming out. The ongoing process experienced by persons to recognize, acknowledge, accept and appreciate their own identities pertaining to sexual orientation and/or gender identity, and to be open about that with others (GLSEN, 2013; HRC Glossary of Terms, 2015).

NOTE: The act of being *closeted* or *coming out* has the potential of being replicated uncountable times throughout one’s life as interactions with family, friends, co-workers, and strangers are navigated (Biegel, 2010). This has been the case in my own life.

Cultural competence. The acquisition of awareness, knowledge, and skills needed to function effectively in a pluralistic society (Sue & Sue, 2008).

Cultural proficiency. The final stage on the continuum (Cultural Proficiency Continuum), where culture is esteemed and one interacts effectively in a variety of cultural contexts (Love, Stiles, Mundry & DiRanna, 2008).

Culturally responsive. Pedagogical practices that have a basis in multicultural orientations, and that incorporate the experiences and contributions reflected in diverse cultures and which include the experiences of diverse students themselves (Gay, 2010).

Diversity. The intentional and active commitment to embrace difference and create a sense of belonging for the purpose of expanding knowledge and encouraging self-actualization. It further involves a commitment to educational equity, cross-cultural understanding, and the creation of respectful, open communities. Embracing diversity requires more than tolerance, acknowledgment of differences, or awareness of others; it requires intentional dispositions and practices (KSU Office of Diversity and Inclusion)⁹. Diversity, for the purposes of this study, also includes gender identity and sexual orientation.

Gay. A word describing a man or a woman who is emotionally, romantically, sexually and relationally attracted to members of the same sex (HRC Glossary of Terms, 2015).

Heteronormative/Heteronormativity. The assumption of heterosexuality as the social and cultural norm; belief that the archetypal human is straight. Under this assumption, other expressions of sexuality are pathologized (Biegel, 2010; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012; Sue & Sue, 2008; Thornton, 2003).

⁹ It should be noted that “inclusion” is part of what is being defined here. See Appendix C for the full text.

Homophobia. The fear, contempt, and hatred of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people; includes prejudice against people who do not “properly” perform expected (assigned at birth) gender roles (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

Identity. The ongoing creative process of lived experience through individual agency; identity inhabits both the individual and collective experience (Alcoff, 2006).

Lesbian. A woman who is emotionally, romantically, sexually and relationally attracted to other women (HRC Glossary of Terms, 2015).

LGBT. An acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender; in this work, it is also used as an “umbrella” term that may include *other than straight, gender non-conforming*, or other relative meanings, depending on context (Biegel, 2010).

Liminality. The transition between states of being. If one's state of being—whether emotional, mental, or physical—can be considered as relatively fixed, liminality is the transitory space or “interstructural situation” between those states (Turner, 1964).

Marginality. The state of racial non-acceptance by a majority group. This syndrome can occur within and between groups. For example, a multiracial (Black and White) individual may experience marginality as a result of being excluded from both racial worlds (Sue & Sue, 2008). For the purposes of this study, I include sexual identity under the marginality umbrella, e.g., LGBT-identified persons marginalized by heteronormative assumptions.

Other/Otherness/the Other. Individuals and groups traditionally oppressed or marginalized from the standpoint of culture, language, sexual orientation, or socio-economic status; these markers are commonly viewed through a binary lens against that which is considered privileged, or the norm (Kumashiro, 2002).

Whiteness/White privilege. An identity or set of identities socially and historically

constructed, and viewed as the “norm” by which difference, deficit, and justice are determined; processes and practices that systematically privilege White people and reproduce hegemonic structures (Perry, 2007).

Conceptual/Methodological Framework

My educational practice, in general, and my practice as an ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) teacher in particular, has been deeply informed by the work of Paulo Freire. At the time I was first introduced to the Brazilian educator’s theories on critical pedagogy I was working toward my Master of Education degree; my concentration was ESOL. In what can only be described as providential my student teaching took place at a middle school located in a neighborhood that, at the time, had become a sort of mecca for immigrant families from Brazil.

Over the three years that I remained in that school as a teacher of EL (English learner) students (the majority coming from the favelas in Brazil), I experienced first-hand the human face of immigration; it was most often a face filled with fear. Sometimes over rampant rumors about ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) officials coming into schools to “snatch illegal immigrants,” and sometimes over the reality of their daily lives: being carted away for deportation the morning after turning 18; returning to an empty apartment because the mom was arrested and thrown into jail in South Carolina (travelling there to seek work) for driving without papers. Many of the mothers among our families from Brazil worked as domestics. Following the passage of then Governor Purdue’s Georgia Security and Immigration Compliance Act, arguably “one of the toughest immigration laws in the country” (Davenport, p. 9), there were mass firings based on workers’ undocumented status and the threat of harsh fines for employers. The emotional and economic toll on my students and their families was devastating.

In an effort to create a context for social justice and disrupt what Freire referred to as the *culture of silence* I urged my students to tap into the power of their own voices and write about their feelings and their fears; they learned that they could change their response to the events impacting their lives to something other than helplessness. We created signs and posters for the “Day Without Immigrants” protest march that I set up as an in-school event; my eighth graders learned that learning, in its most meaningful form, could be dynamic, liberatory, and transformational.

Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (1997) liken the process of qualitative works to our lives in that “[they] are products that we ourselves build from materials that we find most appropriate to what we believe” (p. 5). A framework of critical social justice guides and undergirds this work. This concept, as defined by Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012), is predicated on the following recognitions:

Society is *stratified* (i.e., divided and unequal) in significant and far-reaching ways along social lines that include race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability. Critical social justice recognizes inequality as deeply embedded in the fabric of society (i.e., as structural), and actively seeks to change this. (p. xviii)

The authors further insist that the work of one who is engaged in critical social justice entails the recognition of enactments of unequal social power on multiple levels, critical thinking about one’s own position in these relations and about knowledge, and taking action on these issues for the purpose of social justice (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Certainly, this is a position that echoes that of Freire (1970/2000) who defined praxis as “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (p. 51). Continuing with this theme is the constitutive nature of “doing” autoethnography. Toyosaki and Pensoneau-Conway (2013) argue “autoethnography as

the praxis for social justice entails an examination of the self who engages in social justice/responds to social injustice” (p. 560).

It is important to understand that particular engagement with social justice using a distinctly narrative lens. Chang (2008) differentiates between this methodology and other genres that employ self-narrative devices, stating that autoethnography “engage[s] in cultural analysis and interpretation” (p. 43). This notion of autoethnography as a cultural barometer is presented more emphatically by Ellis (2009a) in her assertion that while her “focus often is on emotionality in the context of relationships and families, [she is] interested in how these micro-events play out in and teach us about macro-structures and processes...that this can happen...through an explicit focus on social justice” (p. 15). In this way, maintains Ellis, using autoethnography as the methodological framework for this study positions me “at the intersection of the personal and the cultural, thinking and observing as an ethnographer and writing and describing as a storyteller” (p. 13). This sentiment serves to indorse Bochner’s (2000) claims about alternative ethnography as a means for broadening and deepening understanding around inquiry into social science. It also speaks to the self-narrative as often more existential—in its subjective meaning-making of the past and over time—than purely academic, and possessing qualities in the realm of the poetic.

A more current and cohesive description comes from Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011), who postulate:

Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience...
[It] treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act. A researcher uses

tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product. (1)

It is within this understanding—autoethnography as *both process and product*—that I situate the context for the conceptual framework in the narrative itself. That is to say, the *writing* is an intrinsic aspect of this qualitative methodology; it does not merely satisfy the necessary producing of this study, but is vital to its shape and meaning as well.

Chang (2008) and Ellis (2009a) agree that what distinguishes autoethnography from other methodologies is that it transcends the self-narrative, but even while it does the work of cultural analysis and interpretation Ellis (2009b) insists that it does so with “caring, feeling, passion, and vulnerability...heart and mind” (p. 362). She further suggests that attempting to *tame* autoethnography into an approach meant for more conventional methodologies, such as realist ethnography, would be a disservice. Ellis strongly believes that autoethnography must remain “unruly, dangerous...rebellious...and the stories...evocative, dramatic, engaging...even heart-breaking” (p. 363). This charge speaks to me both as a qualitative researcher and as a writer.

Approaching my study with these words and images in mind, this methodology will open avenues for the reader to interact with the narrative authentically, reimagining and reconstructing more inclusive worlds along with the researcher and the participant who are inextricably linked.

It is important to note here that autoethnography as a research methodology is still in its early stages, having begun to emerge only in the past two and a half decades (Bochner, 2012). As such, there are broad interpretations of and approaches to autoethnographic research and how it is presented. Autoethnography differs depending upon how much focus is placed on the researcher, the study of others, interaction with others, or more traditional approaches to analysis (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). For the purposes of this dissertation, I have chosen to use the

structure and follow the format of a more traditional dissertation (i.e., five chapters including an introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, and discussion), while using *elements* of autoethnography to help capture, transmit, and interpret the meaning herein. In my view, this approach to and framing of my study creates an evocative narrative for the reader within a comprehensible structure. Hence the phrase in the title, *through an autoethnographic lens*.

Inasmuch as my views around heteronormativity, in particular, have been informed by queer theory, I have chosen not highlight it as a specific research paradigm in this study. That choice has as much to do with my relationship to what I am interrogating and how I locate my personhood as it does with what I feel are the constraints of queer theory. Nevertheless, because its influence is an undeniable presence in my study, I will address its contribution in the following chapter.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

*“When I refuse to listen to how you are different from me, I am refusing
to know who you are.”¹⁰*

– Linda Martín Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (2006, p. 6)

Within the literature discussed here, I have focused on themes that emerged as I pored over the data. Where there is an intersection of ideas from the point of view of the researcher, I have associated the themes for the sake of coherence for the reader, and for the discussion that follows at the end of this work. This chapter includes two vignettes that further exemplify the themes at hand.

Throughout this study are a total of four vignettes. Knowing how these are structured and the reasons for their particular placement in this study may help guide your understanding as the chapters unfold. Vignette 1 opens this dissertation and sets the stage for the problem, the purpose, and the significance of the study. In certain instances, it is easier to understand a concept by experiencing what it is *not*. Vignette 2 is an example of this: at the very time I was learning about the importance of cultural competence with respect to ESOL programs in schools, I had the opportunity to learn from the situation described in the second vignette; thus, its placement. Vignette 3 embodies the crux of my discussion around the concepts of identity and otherness, and therefore opens that particular section. It is, by far, the longest vignette I have included; it also ties into much of the data in the findings chapter. Finally, Vignette 4 opens the

¹⁰ From *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*, by Linda Martín Alcoff, 2006, New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.

chapter on methodology. This vignette brings into sharp focus my positionality—the how and why of the intersectionality of the lens I use to select and interpret my data. In other words, it clearly illustrates the shaping of my worldview. Each vignette is followed by a section entitled *Preliminary Discussion*. I have used those sections to explain and help situate the vignette contextually, within the framework of the subheading or chapter.

Schools as Heteronormative Spaces

In California in the late 90s, the dialectical dynamic of being an out lesbian in my personal life and teaching in an elementary school—closeted only by the limitations of my presumed heterosexuality—found relief in small pockets of everyday experience. The Long Beach chapter of GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network) periodically held their meetings at my school, and I attended regularly. I held hands with my girlfriend in public and even brought her to my school’s holiday event months before returning to the South. In the suburbs of Georgia, however, the term *significant other* has an entirely different meaning when it appears on the staff invitation to the year-end party: it presumes heteronormativity. Teaching first at the middle school level (where my students regularly inquired about my marital status) and later in a K-5 setting, I remained hidden in plain view for nearly seven years before my closet of silence finally became too deafening. The inevitability of this occurring is aptly noted by Johnson (2014): “As much as we conform to meet our labels, we are merely hiding bits and pieces of our identities that, eventually, will leak out” (p. 93).

During my research I became increasingly aware that published works for and about lesbian and gay educators paled in comparison to the burgeoning body of literature that focuses on the rights and protections for LGBT youth in America’s schools. This gap in literature seems

at odds with what many would consider the prevailing logic: before safety measures are put in place for children, conditions that would ensure their implementation by adults should be met. The analogous image that I returned to again and again was that of the flight attendant instructing adults to place the oxygen mask on themselves before attempting to help others—those younger or less capable. Though it may seem at first counterintuitive there is a fundamental logic in this model that is undeniable. In fact, school leaders and LEAs (local education agencies) already apply this kind of logic at every stage of the educational process—from designing a curriculum at the district level to creating the local school vision and mission statements. We do this so that the school’s guiding principles and goals can be implemented effectively, providing a framework for its direction and its priorities.

Researchers have addressed the ways in which LGBT students are stigmatized and bullied as a result of anti-gay prejudice and the heteronormative practices and policies in schools (Blackburn & McCready, 2009; Hackford-Peer, 2010). The troubling statistics to this effect are reported by GLSEN (2013 National School Climate Survey):

- 55.5% of LGBT students felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, and 37.8% because of their gender expression.
- 51.4% of students reported hearing homophobic remarks from their teachers or other school staff, and 55.5% of students reported hearing negative remarks about gender expression from teachers or other school staff.
- 56.7% of LGBT students who were harassed or assaulted in school did not report the incident to school staff, most commonly because they doubted that effective intervention would occur or the situation could become worse if reported. (pp. xvi-xvii)

These statistics are a mere sampling from the sections entitled (respectively) School Safety;

Anti-LGBT Remarks at School; and Harassment and Assault at School.

Conversely, it has been noted that adults like the unresponsive “school staff” illustrated in this excerpt have been widely overlooked in the prevailing research (Blackburn, Clark, Kenney, & Smith, 2010). Of those adults, the staff members who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer often feel further silenced by virtue of their sexual orientation. Rudoe (2010) suggests that some teachers are out to only a select group of colleagues, while others live in daily fear of being “outed,” or discovered; and that neither group can rely on the freedoms and support enjoyed by their heterosexual peers. DePalma and Atkinson (2006) state, “sexualities equality remains the one area of inclusion still largely unaddressed in schools” (p. 332). Burgett and Hendler (2007) contend it is often through the silences and unspoken practices in institutions such as schools where hegemonic practices that normalize limited representations of heterosexuality are reinforced. This is due in part to the widespread perception that LGBT issues have no relevance to pedagogy (DePalma & Atkinson, 2006; Fenwick & Saunders, 2012; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2001; Rudoe, 2010).

Thornton (2003) reminds us that it was not so long ago that the social studies curriculum in schools was centered within a “male, Protestant, and Anglo-Saxon” (p. 226) paradigm. There existed little to no mention of the contributions made by women, racial or ethnic groups (e.g., Black, Latino/a, persons of Middle Eastern descent) other than White, or religious groups outside of American Protestantism. In his concise and incisive article, Thornton (2003) makes a clear case for what he views as an undeniable failure of the K-12 social studies curriculum: the silence around lesbians and gays within society. Whether in the context of politics, law, or the vast media landscape, Thornton contends that any use of the terms *gay*, *straight* and *homosexual* have been deliberately omitted from textbooks in U.S. schools. When such practices go unchallenged

and ignored by teachers and administrators, it furthers a “hidden curriculum” (p. 228) that condemns sex roles outside of what is considered the norm. Thornton (2003) calls this “one of the most successful exercises in social training that schools perform” (p. 228) because everyone gets to see it; abiding by it becomes the status quo. The resulting perpetuation of heteronormativity (manifesting as intolerance, sometimes accompanied by various degrees of harassment and violence) means children learn about their world through an entirely skewed and prejudiced lens.

Under the assumption of heteronormativity, heterosexuality is not only the sexual norm, but the social and cultural norm as well; other expressions of sexuality, thus, are pathologized (Biegel, 2010; Sue & Sue, 2008; Thornton, 2003). Echoing this sentiment, Martin (1994) and Namaste (1994) both maintain that such beliefs ascribe dominance and normality to one group and attribute a subordinate and deviant identity to the other (as cited in Lorber, 1996). Such views are so entrenched in our society and the resulting silences so loud that even in the academy where a course in cultural literacy is taught to graduate students who identify as LGBT, language around gender and sexuality can remain starkly absent. Clark (2010) recounts taking stock of her textual practices in the late 90s and being startled by how inexplicit she was in naming categories (in the syllabi and in discussions) outside of what was standard practice. Reflectively, she writes, “...even as I asked my students to consider silencing around issues of race, I failed to interrogate my own silence around gender and sexuality” (p. 45).

Making the case for ending such silences in schools, Savage and Harley (2009) assert that history is the great equalizer. They cite cases that have been won and legislation that has been passed in the name of equal rights. In addition, they state that nearly thirty percent of students in any given classroom are impacted somehow by issues surrounding sexual minorities. Given the

sheer numbers, they propose a curriculum in public schools that is more reflective of the LGBT diversity that exists in our society. So, just as it was critically important to address the absence of Black and Latino/Latina images in classrooms and in testing materials, it is becoming equally important to address the invisibility of LGBT images. All students *and educators* should be able to see themselves, as well as their families and community members as valid citizens worthy of respect, and as valuable contributors in a socially just American society.

To this point, in March of 2011, Education Secretary Arne Duncan delivered remarks to the Commission on Bullying in Washington, D.C.:

Students should not be threatened physically, isolated socially, or hurt emotionally based on their skin color, their ethnicity, any physical or mental disabilities, their sex, their sexual orientation, their gender identity, religion or any other reason...I start with a simple premise that no school can be a great school until it is a safe school.

Later in the spring of that same year, California's SB 48, the FAIR (Fair, Accurate, Inclusive, and Respectful) Education Act passed the Senate and was headed to Governor Jerry Brown's desk for his signature. The bill mandated that public schools in the state begin including in the curriculum the respectful and accurate portrayal of LGBT people and their contributions. Mark Leno, the legislator who wrote the bill (and happens to be gay), said he did so "in response to the tragedy of bullying and resulting suicides" (Broverman, 2011). The landmark legislation was signed into law a few months later, and is currently in the beginning stages of implementation. Yet, even with LGBT curriculum in place in school districts across that state, bullying of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning youths still occurs at exceedingly high rates (GLSEN 2013 National School Climate Survey).

One uncontested site of persistent progression is in the area of same-sex marriage in states across the country. After Massachusetts became the first state in the U.S. to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples in 2004, four years would pass before another state—Connecticut, in 2008—would follow suit. It should be noted that within that time period 21 states passed constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriage (NPR, 2013a). Nevertheless, the die had been cast: in 2012 Obama became the first sitting President to publicly declare his support for same-sex couples to have the right to marry; the U.S. Supreme Court in 2013 ruled DOMA (Defense of Marriage Act) unconstitutional (NPR, 2013b); and to date, there are 36 states where same-sex marriage, either through ballot measures or legislation, has been legalized (Freedom to Marry, 2015). According to an NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll, 59% of the population (an all-time high) favors marriage for all couples (“6 in 10 Support,” 2015).

In the summer of 2015 the U.S. Supreme Court is expected to issue a landmark ruling regarding state bans on same-sex marriage. Hensley (2015) proposes this could pave the way for a “national standard.” She argues that anticipation of that ruling is behind the unprecedented number of bills pushing back on LGBT rights, including punitive measures for those who uphold those rights (officials who issue same-sex marriage certificates). Conservative lawmakers in some states, including Georgia, have fashioned bills after the RFRA (Religious Freedom Restoration Act). This would allow private sector business owners to cite religious beliefs as the basis for denying services to same-sex couples. The legal director for HRC (Human Rights Campaign), Sarah Warbelow, is quoted in the article as stating, “It sounds like religious freedom, but it’s really about discrimination against people under the cloak of religion.”

In fact, some would argue that RFRA is tantamount to a wholesale legalization of discrimination. And, just as in institutions of learning, it uses what North describes as “cultural

biases that privilege dominant groups and perspectives (White, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied, Christian, male) in existing educational structures” (as cited in Meyer, 2010, p. 18).

Such biases have worked against social justice education that seeks to broaden the definition of diversity in education to be inclusive of diverse genders and sexualities. Faith-based arguments on the other hand, which have high visibility in public education, contribute to reinforcing heteronormative practices in schools (Meyer, 2010).

Queer theory helps to interrogate and attempts to disrupt the norms of gender and sexual orientation that exist as normative and, therefore, acceptable in schools and classrooms. It addresses identity in critical ways, as persons who identify outside of their gender must continuously negotiate and renegotiate their identities in spaces that are constituted to reflect heteronormative values, and are therefore often unsafe (Butler, 2009; Halberstam, 2005). Butler stresses: “Gender norms have everything to do with how and in what way we can appear in public space; how and in what way the public and private are distinguished, and how that distinction is instrumentalized” (ii). Halberstam (2005) defines “queer” in more general terms: “nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity” (p. 6). Foucault (1978) illustrates the binary of normative and nonnormative, a facet central to queer theory, in his discursive theory of power; it is centralized within the mechanisms where such discourses are proliferated. His “*perpetual spirals of power and pleasure*” (p. 45) describes the interplay that exists between the one who questions or examines the individual with pathology (i.e., homosexuality), and the ones that satisfy such curiosities.

Challenging the notion of normality and arguing that this myopic view not only excludes the wide range of other expressions (sexual and otherwise) for gays but further stigmatizes them, Warner (1999) contends that the queer life is not merely the binary opposition of heterosexuality

but also of the social and economic structures that serve to maintain heteronormative systems. Yet, in acknowledging these systems—institutional hegemonic structures that influence and impact practices around gender and sexuality in the public/private spheres—the exclusion of race from queer theory must also be acknowledged.

Cohen (1997) declares there is a “continuing practice of racism many of us experience on a daily basis in lesbian and gay communities” (p. 437). She asserts this is born out of a queer politics that aims to replicate oppressive institutions rather than establish inclusive ones. While there are clear intersections that exist in the struggle for sexual and gender equality on the part of women and men, that struggle looks markedly different for those who are marginalized on multiple fronts (e.g., race, economics, education) than it does for those whose Whiteness often provides immediate access to the privileges conferred upon them as members of the dominant culture.

In fact, Ferguson (2007), in his application of race “to queer formations demonstrates how the mainstream gay rights movement fosters forms of white privilege and displaces queers of color, particularly those marginalized by class and nationality” (p. 196). The argument that race and ethnicity have taken a back seat to an almost single-mindedness around sexual identity and orientation in queer politics is not new. Cohen (1997) proposes that queerness take a radical stance against the status quo and create coalitions with not only those who commit themselves to “liberatory politics” but also with those who are viewed as Other; those who live and work on the margins of society. She states that is a potential that lies “at the intersection of oppression and resistance” (p. 440).

Intersectionality

To further her assertions around expanding queer theory to make it more inclusive, Cohen (1997) provides the opening statement from the Combahee River Collective, a group of progressive Black feminists who have been meeting since 1974. Here is an excerpt of that declaration: "...we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of *integrated* analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking" (p. 441). Cohen asks the reader to not just recognize that intersecting oppressions exist, but to work to understand the multiple layers that disadvantage some while advantaging others.

It is generally accepted that Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" in her 1989 article examining feminist theory as it relates to Black women. In a conversation with other scholars of intersectionality, she explains her use of that term as a metaphor for how "systems of oppression overlap" (Guidroz & Berger, 2009, p. 65). Crenshaw is careful to point out that intersectionality is not a mere multiplying of categories of identity, but rather requires "constituting a structural analysis...as to how their particular conditions are located within structures of power" (p. 70). She drew on her work in the legal system to examine domestic violence and the multiplicity of forces—economic, social, and political—that are implicated in how policies are structured to address populations that experience subordination.

Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (2000), in her book "Black Feminist Thought," took the analysis beyond race and gender; she also included class, culture, and sexuality as forms of oppression. In the organic link she makes between Black feminism/Black feminist thought and social justice, she contends that the "historical suppression of Black women's ideas has had a pronounced influence on feminist theory" (p. 5). The rejection by White feminists of Black feminists as full colleagues has been one form of this type of oppression, according to Collins. Black feminist

scholar, bell hooks (1994), was faced with frustrations around racist/sexist biases as the feminist movement was emerging: “I found that when “women” were talked about, the experience of white women was universalized to stand for all female experience...” (p. 121). Collins claims a rejection of the experiences and ideas of Black women occurs within the assumption that certain categories of inquiry are the sole domain of a particular group, e.g., “Whiteness for feminist thought, maleness for Black social and political thought, and the combination for mainstream scholarship” (p. 12). This positions Black feminists at what she terms an “outsider-within” location. hooks (1994) has argued that such exclusionary practices make “feminism and feminist theory...a commodity that only the privileged can afford” (p. 71).

But from that “outsider-within” space of marginality – even *isolation* – one is forced to perceive and to consider using a very different lens. Many feminists of color, including Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Andrea Canaan, have realized new opportunities for dialogue and sisterhood beyond the barriers of separation. Instead of glossing over or ignoring what keeps them apart, Keating (2009) recognizes that these writers “explore [the differences]; risking the personal, they expose (both to themselves and to their readers) their own previously hidden fears and desires” (p. 85). Among the diverse groups (even men) of self-identified feminists, they demonstrate ways to facilitate alliances and create commonality. In her frank dialogue with a White male colleague, bell hooks (1994) acknowledges the value of interacting beyond differences, even when it is with someone who (in this case) “bestow[s] specific powers and privileges” (p. 131). Here, hooks connotes the notion of being an *outsider within*:

Aware of myself as a subject in history, a member of a marginalized and oppressed group, victimized by institutional racism, sexism, and class elitism, I had tremendous fear that I would teach in a manner that would reinforce those hierarchies. Yet I had

absolutely no model, no example of what it would mean to enter a classroom and teach in a different way. (p. 142)

Drawing on queer, feminist, and women of color critiques, Roderick Ferguson (2007) acknowledges that the application of intersectionality creates a more cohesive understanding of the connections between gender, class, sexual regulation/normativity, freedom, and identity.

In his “queer of color critique” Ferguson (2004) examines the social, economic, and political forces that were in play in the mid-twentieth century with the influx of immigrants to American shores. “Theodore Roosevelt endorsed the naturalization of European immigrants... extend[ing] white racial difference to [them]” (p. 33). Assimilation of these new populations was the ideal; this, on the basis that intermarriage would occur only between Whites, thereby promoting the integrity of the race through heterosexual reproduction. Of course, that was not always the case. With the increasingly porous nature of regulatory boundaries, geographical as well as sexual, came the new crisis of trying to “keep desire within the racialized confines of the heteropatriarchal household and the segregated neighborhood” (p. 36). Policing those neighborhoods was one means of carrying this out.

My mother arrived on U.S. shores as an Austrian immigrant (by way of England) in 1940. Her first (very brief) place of residence was in Connecticut with a distant cousin. She then moved to New York City, where she would spend the rest of her life. Four years after her arrival, in 1944, my mother gave birth to Nonnine, her first of seven biracial children. Clearly, Mimi Rosenfeld did not fit the profile of the naturalized European immigrant Roosevelt had in mind. And while her choices were certainly atypical for the time, her timely fortitude—even audacity—in the face of authority was something that deserved my constant admiration as I grew up and observed how she navigated her world. Long before “DWB” ever came into existence,

my mother had a sense of what it meant to be profiled by the police. The following account happened sometime prior to the end of 1945 – at least seven years before I was born.

Mimi was on a New York City subway with Nonnine's father when a White uniformed policeman approached her. "Why are you with him?" he asked, indicating the Black man seated beside her. "You can do better than that." As my mother has retold this story, she rose from her seat and, standing eye to eye with the officer, rebuked, "How dare you!" She then proceeded to write down his badge number, continuing in her heavily accented English, "You will hear about this!" Once home, she penned a letter (I can only imagine what she wrote) to none other than Mayor Fiorello La Guardia (in office for three terms, from January 1934 – December 1945). In her retelling, my mother was most proud of the fact that she received a heartfelt reply from the then mayor, apologizing for the officer's impropriety and assuring her that the policeman had indeed been reprimanded.

Muhammad (2010) writes that the biologically inferior Negro with "racial traits and individual pathology" that was popularized in the early twentieth century persisted long after the veracity of the Negro/crime intersection, for example, was debunked by White and Black criminologists and scholars alike. Indeed, such notions are still painfully (and often tragically) apparent today. In the above scenario, the familiar intersection of policing and the Black body was clear. Even while the officer's direct interaction took place only with my White mother, the explicit and implicit message was that she should disassociate herself from the inferior Black man. In the police officer's comments was also the attempt at sexual regulation (Collins, 2000; Ferguson, 2007) based on race, and conceivably perceptions of class and normativity. Drawing on Cohen's notion of intersecting oppressions, one might ask whether and how my mother's privilege of Whiteness was disadvantaged by her choice to be with a Black man; how (or

whether) *he* was advantaged by the inverse choice – to be with a White woman; and how they both might have experienced overlapping systems of oppression.

The overlapping systems of power and oppression in this scenario are daunting. When examined through the lens of history, they become ever more complex. Although non-existent in New York, it was common knowledge that laws around miscegenation had been passed in a majority of states across the nation. In fact, in 1945 anti-miscegenation laws still existed in 30 states from Delaware to California (Miscegenation, n.d.). In addressing my mother, the police officer was apparently aligning himself with her on the basis of Whiteness. However, one can only wonder what went through his mind when she first uttered her rebuke: my mother had a pronounced Viennese accent that remained with her throughout her life. Whiteness, I would argue, was a wholly different concept (if it existed at all) in Austria in the mid twentieth century. For such a concept to even exist (embodying all the structural privilege thereupon ascribed), it must be viewed in direct opposition to that which is considered Other: Blackness (Ferguson, 2004; Muhammad, 2010; Sue & Sue, 2008). Startlingly, my mother had never set eyes on a Black person (in her case, a turbaned man from India) until she arrived in England – sent there as a protective measure by her parents (whom she would never see again) in the midst of the Nazi occupation. To add yet another facet to this conundrum of intersectionality, there was the reality of anti-Semitism about which my mother had an intense awareness. In fact, that is the reasoning she provided when I asked her about the name “Field” on my birth certificate. She felt it would be better for her children and herself not to be identified as Jews. When I checked with my oldest sister, Nonnine, I was surprised to learn that Mama had begun using the fictional anglicized version of Rosenfeld eight years earlier.

Diversity and Cultural Competence

The semantic uses of *diversity* and *inclusion*, both of which are employed in discussions on culturally relevant pedagogy, rarely include or even allude to LGBT-relevant terms. In fact, Alvarez and Schneider (2008) point out the conflict that exists between these two terms, which are often used interchangeably: “Universities will proudly announce their commitments to a diverse community of learners but will offer very limited possibilities for meaningful inclusion” (pg. 73). At the same time, LGBT and related terms (most often, *gay* and *lesbian*) to denote sexual orientation are frequently referred to in isolation, as if there is mutual exclusivity between diverse ways of identifying and sexual orientation. Yet the intersectionality that exists should not be overlooked in the context of education and pedagogical practices. Kumashiro (2002) argues that “to speak of identities always and only in their separate(d) incarnations...not only denies ways in which identities are already intersected, but more importantly, masks ways in which certain identities are already privileged” (p. 56).

It could be argued that the structural privilege that exists in the dominant culture, to which the majority of teachers belong, contributes to teachers’ level of ethnocentricity (Cushner, McClelland & Safford, 2006). Diversity, when viewed through an ethnocentric lens, is often seen as a deficit and hampered by limitations—a stance that further compounds teachers’ lack of cultural competence. Academic underachievement among students belonging to disenfranchised groups is often the inevitable outcome (Cummins, 2001; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Teachers who know the importance of delivering instruction in ways that are culturally competent are consciously committed to taking stock of themselves/their personal biases; this allows them to meet students where they are. However, teachers are rarely if ever called upon to do any sort of epistemological accounting of whose knowledge is being served—and to whom.

Therefore, the majority of teachers are not inclined to critically question their personal or pedagogical views about knowledge, its construction or dissemination (Apple, 2004). But even at a more fundamental level, I have observed among teachers genuine challenges to find compassion and empathy toward other cultures. Bennett (as cited in Cushner, McClelland & Safford, 2006) states, “Intercultural sensitivity is not natural. It is not part of our primate past, nor has it characterized most of human history... education and training in intercultural communication is an approach to changing our “natural” behavior” (p. 134). This would be an important consideration as actions are undertaken to effect transformational change on a personal level as well as school-wide. Beyond that, it is critical to recognize that these teachers—just like their students—ought to be met where they are.

Vignette 2: *Practicing ESOL*

In a highly diverse school in a city that borders Atlanta, Ms. Akers, an ESOL teacher, was ending another teaching day. The K-5 elementary school where she had worked for about six years was one of a number of PDS (professional development school) partners with the university where I was completing my Master of Education degree, and working toward ESOL certification; I had been paired with Akers for my three-month practicum.

In one memorable exchange, she opened up to me about her teaching assignments at various schools earlier in her career. She became animated as she related how one of her previous jobs “in a bad neighborhood” had been stressful both physically and emotionally because the majority of the students were Black. The district had only given her the assignment, she complained, because she could speak Spanish—but surprisingly few of her students were Spanish speakers. Referring to the Latino/Latina students, she commented, “I wished I had more of *them* because they’re so sweet and well-behaved,” attributing this to family upbringing. “But

the Black students...” Ms. Akers suddenly recognized that because I was a woman of color her story (and the tone in which she was sharing it) might not be appropriate. She then quickly changed her tack: “I hope you weren’t offended. You’re not like them; you’re a different kind of Black.”

Preliminary Discussion

In her stated preference of Latinos/Latinas over Blacks (Brownness over Blackness) Akers, who is White, seems to have been utilizing what Bonilla-Silva (2002) refers to as ‘the rhetorical maze of color blindness’: “I am not prejudiced, but...” (p. 46). Her comment about my ‘different Blackness’ would be at the very least unexpected (and certainly politically incorrect speech) coming from almost any educator in the 21st century. But from an ESOL teacher (someone who is often viewed as an advocate for marginalized students) the comment was even less anticipated. It is not insignificant that Ms. Akers had revealed to me in an earlier exchange how proud she was of the fact that she had managed to acquire her endorsement¹¹ in ESOL at a three-weekend course at a facility somewhere in New England a few years prior to NCLB (No Child Left Behind) being instated. Picower (2009) explains, “Many teacher educators work hard to develop this racialized critical consciousness through courses such as multicultural education...[but] there are multiple accounts of reported resistance to these courses and concepts by White...teachers” (199). Thus, while Akers’ ESOL credentials (when judged against the minimum qualifications for Georgia) were grossly inadequate, she seemed content with her level of knowledge.

In the opening passage of *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois (1903/1969) asks the

¹¹ Typically consisting of three courses, this endorsement provides certified P-12 teachers foundational pedagogical and cultural competency skills for working with culturally and linguistically diverse students. Coursework generally takes 2-3 semesters to complete; in many programs, the final course takes place in an ESOL classroom (practicum).

question, “How does it feel to be a problem?” (p. 37). Akers’ discourse indicated she embraced a reality where the mere fact of Blackness was the problem; she felt comfortable and justified in reinforcing one of the most common and entrenched racial stereotypes in American society.

Picower (2009) exemplifies this in her study with pre-service teachers when she states

fear was by far the most prevalent hegemonic story shared. [They] expressed a sense of anxiety in situations with people of color, largely based on stereotypes... With only a few exceptions, all of their stories involved African-Americans as dangerous criminals who violated the participants’ sense of safety. (p. 202)

In the instance when she caught herself and doubled back on the story, it was clear that Akers identified and recognized me as having membership in that “problem” group of Blackness. But her “compliment” (*You’re a different kind of Black*) was meant to elevate my status to the level of *an exception* among an otherwise negatively stereotyped racial group. It was not the first time I had been “privileged” in this way by a well-meaning person who was White. So I recognized the comment for what it was—at its simplest level, unaddressed bias, unrecognized racism—and filed it away, along with a more complete profile of the teacher with whom I was working side by side.

As educators working in a public school system, we are charged with teaching a particular curriculum. And we teach it with our unique and individual worldview—after all, that’s who we are and what we bring to the craft of teaching. That worldview is the context, or a backdrop, for how we deliver the curriculum. Consider the second and third grade students in Ms. Akers’ care – the ones who are learning English and, in many cases, a new culture and social structure along with their parents; students who are here as refugees from their war-torn home country; others whose often transient status is due to parents’ unstable seasonal employment.

The set of rhetorical questions I pose now nearly mirror those that followed the first vignette (page 5): As these children learn to be part of a community of critical thinkers and learners, engaged and engaging citizens in a world that is rapidly shrinking, what is the narrative they are learning about themselves, their families, and their culture when teachers' harmful biases bleed through everyday instruction? What is contained in the messages having to do with fairness and tolerance? What are they learning about privilege, and what are they being made to feel about the Otherness ascribed to them or reinforced about them? If nothing else, the second and third grade students in Akers' charge will undoubtedly internalize what they are learning from what is intangibly implied in the messages that live on her body, and in the energy around her words. Perhaps even more than what is presented explicitly.

Teachers are in many different places regarding the issues discussed here. Gay (2005) finds a discrepancy between what educators—including those charged with educating pre-service teachers—claim to endorse about diversity and what they actually demonstrate. When they are confronted with issues of “social injustices, White power and privilege, and racial and ethnic marginality” many sidestep it altogether to avoid racial accusations (or the discomfort) that would supposedly arise (p. 225). Some education theorists (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gay, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2010; Meyer, 2010) attribute the gaping divide between academic achievement for students of color (and other marginalized students) and that of European American students to the fact that issues of diversity and social justice have not been addressed in schools but rather systemically ignored. In fact, silence creates a fertile environment for microaggressions¹² to exist and fester. According to Sue, Bucci, Lin, Nadal & Torino (as cited in Sue & Sue, 2008), “microaggressions...are more likely to occur when people pretend not to

¹² Defined by Sue, Bucci, Lin, Nadal & Torino as “‘brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages’ to a target group such as people of color, women, and gays” (as cited in Sue & Sue, 2008).

notice differences, thereby denying that race, gender, or sexual orientation had anything to do with their actions” (p. 110).

Making a strong case for why schools must address social justice and diversity issues, and broadening the definition for the latter, Meyer (2010) names five compelling reasons why educators should be knowledgeable about the very issues around which they experience the greatest resistance. First, due to the prevalence of heavily gendered bullying that begins in elementary school and surfaces again in puberty, teachers must be able to use explicit language that addresses what is fundamentally a school safety issue. Next, students’ physical and emotional health is placed at risk when faced with school environments that are hostile. Meyer has found that the alternatives students are faced with include skipping or even quitting school, engaging in high-risk (drug, alcohol, sex) behaviors, and resorting to suicide. In addition, preparing students for the multicultural and democratic society in which they will be active citizens is the purpose of school. Meyer (2010) stresses the importance of specificity when it comes to addressing sexual diversity and gender identity; valuing all students gives all students an opportunity for success. Furthermore, academic success and student engagement improve in a positive school climate. When the culture of a school is inclusive, with visible and active support systems (including protective policies, Gay Straight Alliances) in place, the learning environment is more suited to academic achievement. Finally, Meyer proposes adding sexual diversity to the curriculum.

My ten years spent as an ESOL teacher in my district have convinced me that one cannot properly address the learning gaps among culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students without also calling into question the practices that occur at the classroom level and the support systems that exist at the district and state levels. Are there imperatives at these various

institutional levels that address diversity and inclusion? While practices that are—or are not—culturally competent directly impact CLD students, they also indirectly impact those students' relationships with their families, and the families themselves. The same holds true for sexually diverse students and their families.

Identity and Otherness

Vignette 3: Practicing Judaism

The summer before junior high school, my mother decided not to send my sisters and me to sleep-away camp. Instead, she bought each of us a black composition notebook and a ballpoint pen, and for two months we spent every hot New York morning and part of the afternoons transcribing hours of dictation. Mama was a fiercely determined woman, and in her characteristically leonine approach to personal convictions, she was hell-bent on preparing her three daughters for Hebrew school. “You are biracial children, so it won’t be easy,” her markedly Austrian accent re-imaging every “r” to its most alveolar form, and stressing the weariest “w” into a razor-sharp “v.” We accepted that she was born with the gift of prescience, and we knew her protective warning should be taken to heart. Then, as if outfitting us with armor we’d need to steel ourselves against the inevitable blows of bigotry, “Judaism is your birthright; no one can take that away.” Her words felt oddly comforting—like one of those heavy dark green wool blankets, the kind that were tucked in (with “hospital corners”) over the soft white sheets at Camp Wildwood: I’d endured the weight and scratchiness of it only because

I could count on the cold never penetrating its fibers. I didn't know at the time this would be a different kind of burden to bear.

I sat at Mama's feet drinking in biblical history, folklore, and mysticism; I recorded dozens of details around celebrations for Hanukkah, Passover, and Purim—writing, sometimes, until my fingers were numb. Much later in the summer, shortly before we were to begin Hebrew classes, Mama told us about the Holocaust. In a single instant I learned about the depth of evil that could exist in the world; in the next, I realized how that same evil had stained the fabric that was my family and altered its landscape forever. Until that morning, I had no real conception of *aunt* or *uncle*, and no model for the meaning of *cousin*, the little boy who was my mother's only sister's son. I heard such vitriol in Mama's voice as she delivered the words that struggled to explain the unexplainable annihilation of a people and my family, “...*train cars...herded like animals. Hitler...showers...the SS...gas chambers...chimneys...ashes.*” The images like well-stropped razors sliced through my existence and the appendage of my childhood with such precision I never even knew it was lost. Breathless, airless, I reached across to my darling mother awash in the ashen waves that pooled around us both; the questions I'd never known existed rose swirling. How I wanted to dive deeply into Mama's penetrating brown eyes not tinged by hatred but only the faded reflected image of a solitary child against a vast seascape of loneliness that was its home.

Traveling downtown from East Harlem's Wagner Projects, we'd catch the M15 bus on the corner of 122nd Street and 2nd Avenue. I'd sit in a forward-facing seat more often than not, on the exit side, so that I could get a close-up view of the storefronts flying by on the other side of the cold smooth glass. The double doors thudding closed and the wheels hissing to a stop

became my inevitable background symphony while I lost myself in endless daydreams. The sentient world outside was my ever-changing backdrop: the fat gray cat languishing among strips of discarded fabric oblivious to the stir and hum of the streets beyond the tailor's windowpane. The run-down Italian bakery that never failed to deliver its dulcet aromas no matter the season or the heaps of trash piled on the sidewalk because of another sanitation strike.

In Manhattan, the geographic demarcation line that separates classes is 96th Street. That divide is most recognizable on Lexington Avenue, where the landmark is four blocks south: the 92nd Street Y, host to such luminaries as Leonard Cohen and Adrienne Rich. Two more stops and it's Yorkville, the Upper East Side hub of the German-Jewish elite. Our Hebrew school, at Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun, was just one and a half blocks west. Tethered now by the fact of DNA to this new historical context, it felt at once wonderful, frightening, and altogether challenging.

My mother loved the traditions associated with Judaism, even though the only one she remained devoted to throughout my childhood was Passover. We never had the proper extra set of plates and silverware, but were always certain to wash the everyday dishes more carefully whenever we prepared for that first Seder. Chanukah, for us, turned out to be mostly about the dreidel and chocolate gelt, although I loved the lighting of the candles; whenever we did observe, I'd make a personal contest out of watching them burn down until the final flicker. For Purim, Mama would surprise us (when money allowed) with the most buttery delicious hamentashen from the bakery near Hebrew school; her and my favorite were the ones with poppy seed filling. Some years we'd all take the bus downtown to hear the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah. Mama often put the traditional fasting for Yom Kippur (the highest holy day) up for a vote, and we'd usually all agree to it; if we competed with one another, the results were far better.

Because of Mama's fondness for the cantor's chanting of the Kol Nidrei, the special prayer recited on Yom Kippur, we all headed to the synagogue. Even before leaving the house, I had decided that I'd be the one to touch the Torah during the procession of the scrolls as they were paraded along the aisles. So when we were seated and I saw that only two people separated me from my goal that evening, I felt pretty confident. When the time came, the entire congregation rose to their feet and as the elaborate, heavily encased Torah scrolls inched closer, I prepared myself: in my gentlest and most refined voice, I said, "Excuse me" to the well-dressed graying lady standing beside me. And I stretched out my left arm. The sudden shock of my hand being slapped away was supplanted only a moment later by the woman's vindictive glare as our eyes met. What followed was the hiss of a single two-syllable word, the force of which felt as if it were being spat in my face. It was a word that I had not heard before in a language that I could only presume was German. Suddenly, as if she herself had been struck, my mother's entire being seemed to overtake the narrow pew where we stood and emitting from her mouth in the most threatening torrential wave were more German words than I had ever heard her speak before or since.

Mama made it a point to guide my hand to one of the passing scrolls before she proudly marched her brood of biracial children out the doors of the synagogue and into the chilly evening. She explained that the word, yelled in Yiddish, was "schvartze" and that its literal meaning was "black." The way it was used, however (and she seemed to struggle for an appropriate translation), meant "dirty." She was sorry I had to hear that, and assured me that I had every right in the world to touch the Torah. There was a short treatise on what kind of "ignorant and bigoted" person would have the audacity to say something so insulting, followed by utterances of "How dare she—the nerve of her!" Later that week, she kept her promise to

make a full report to the head rabbi.

“You know what your heritage is,” she had always told us from an early age. “You are Austrian and White European on your mother’s side and Black American on your father’s side. But the world,” Mama said, “will only see you as Black.” During the years I and my sisters and brother attended Hebrew school, I lived in and between two worlds: one white, affluent, and religious; the other, my neighborhood of Spanish Harlem—culturally and linguistically diverse and lower middle class to poor. Neither of these worlds made any sense for my identity that struggled to attach itself to some sense of belonging. Neither world accepted me fully, nor I them. I began to recognize viscerally a world brimming with preconceived notions of color, culture, and class. I was somewhere outside of the lines of what was considered the norm. For quite some time, that place of liminality felt like home. And I learned how to use it.

Preliminary Discussion

Easier to handle than the occasional taunts of *half-breed*, “What are you?” was a constant and common question when I was growing up. There seemed to be a discomfort for others regarding their inability to place me into one neatly preexisting box or another. It was a question I didn’t always feel the need to satisfy, and when I did would allow myself a great deal of leeway with my reply. As teenagers, my sister, Barbara, and I sometimes would create an alternate identity—often accompanied by a highly convincing British accent—and maintain it for an entire evening as we interacted with strangers, or rode the subway. We’d be from a country in Africa or a boarding school in the Swiss Alps, daughters of diplomats, or visiting New York on holiday. We certainly didn’t realize it at the time and possessed no academic terms for it, but we were foregoing the constructions of “race” for what we may have sensed was a more valid expression of nationality. Having had it imposed on us for so long, it seemed my sister and I had

learned how to *perform* Otherness.

Alcoff (2006), on the topic of nationality versus race, suggests that “nationality, culture, and language are so critical to identity...nationality could be taken as a more important distinguishing characteristic than race” (p. 279). What we did in our “identity performances” felt akin to playing dress-up, where our only “costumes” were fantasies of far-away lands, foreign accents, and the indomitable spirit it took to carry out such spontaneous public theatrics without ever being called into question. With regard to the notion of Otherness, Alcoff states that “the experience of having mixed or ambiguous identity teaches lessons early on about the fluid and at times arbitrary nature of social identity designations” (p. ix). Throughout my childhood (and far beyond) other people’s overwhelming preoccupation with, distrust of, and preconceived notions around my skin color and everyday speech expression was a confounding reality and one that felt ever-present.

Among the body of research on educators’ implementation of culturally responsive practices in the classroom, very little has been studied about the complexities of the diverse classroom from the child’s perspective. In an unusual study, Dutro, Kazemi, Balf and Lin (2008) examined how a diverse group of students were challenged not only by their ability to self-identify, but also by being prescribed identities by their peers. Implications specific to the biracial children were centered in the struggle between self-identifying based on “who you are” and others feeling justified in prescribing an identity based on a single feature—skin color. Another observation had to do with the biracial experience as changing “the landscape of race” (p. 294), bringing into question where racial categories begin and end. The research aim for Dutro et al., 2008, in their qualitative ethnographic case study was for a broader understanding of the complexities inherent in using culturally responsive instruction. Even in schools with

relatively low diversity, the importance of self-identifying cannot be overstated. The poignancy with which the students in the study articulated their views, and the conviction and strength in their arguments challenges us to “question the myths on which racism rests” (p. 294). One crucial outcome brought to light by the study begs serious consideration from teachers, administrators, and school systems: “what counts as identity and who gets to decide what you are” (p. 295).

Alcoff (2006) tackles these questions broadly, discounting the “black/white paradigm” that falls into a limiting binary classification; investigating the political tugs of war so often evident in identity politics—particularly where group and social identity is concerned; and goes far beneath and between the manifold and complex layers from which identity merges and emerges. She focuses on raced and gendered (less so on the latter) identities, examining even the intricacies of skin color variance in her own multi-raced family. While those of us who have lived in and between multiple racial contexts experience the realities of being identified by both dominant and dominated cultures for whatever purposes might suit their respective needs, Alcoff argues that “public interpellation cannot be the sole determinant of a person’s identity in any true and meaningful sense...identity includes lived experience, the horizon of meanings to which a person has access, in other words, their own subjectivity” (p. 284).

Ngo (2010) makes use of the concept of ambivalence to help make sense of identities as not fixed nor easily (if at all) resolved. She argues for the need to “unmask...and unsettle the hegemony of discourses that frame identities within discrete, binary categories” (p. 5). That is because they are complex, inconsistent, and contradictory, and there is an ever-changing multiplicity of understandings upon which to draw to create meaning—none of which remains stagnant. Ngo names educational institutions as sites of power where these discourses are

proliferated, and further contends that identities become blurred or oppressed—even held captive—by discursive practices that constitute identity through binary oppositions.

As one who inhabits and navigates multiple cultural and social identities, I would concur that using a binary paradigm for identity—particularly with those who may be marginalized in other ways (e.g., economically or with regard to sexual orientation)—is confining at best. More disturbingly, when those in power have the ability to identify one group as *less than*, in direct opposition to another with all the supposedly positive attributes that the former should strive to attain, both are left devalued. Identities constructed by external sources can never be anything but inauthentic; beyond that, the spectrum of identities that lies between the binary extremes is rarely if ever recognized.

Autoethnography and Reflexivity

My choice to use autoethnography as the qualitative method for this study positions me, in accordance with the depiction offered by Ellis (2009a), “at the intersection of the personal and the cultural, thinking and observing as an ethnographer and writing and describing as a storyteller” (p. 13). This intersection appeals to my sense of responsibility and kinship to the politics of pedagogy while it also addresses my need as a writer to express my observations, reflections, and desires in a narrative form that is accessible to the reader. But autoethnography goes beyond being merely accessible. Bochner (2012) insists that it is “not intended to be received, but rather to be encountered, conversed with, and appreciated” (p. 161). So, as I stand at the juncture described here there is space for constant interchange between researcher and reader. In their discussion of the unique quality of the narrative approach to presenting research, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remark that, “Narrative inquiry always has purpose, though

purpose may shift, and always has focus, though focus may blur and move...boundaries expand and contract, and wherever they are at any point in time...[are] interactively permeable” (p. 115). I allow myself, in my writing, to be given over to the reader who can interact with me at once as a private person, as an educator, and as a researcher who, like themselves, may be in the process of trying to come to terms with questions that may not have ready answers. As I consider the autoethnographic approach to my dissertation, it occurs to me with certainty that what I bring to the writing process and how I change in the process will be a fluid experience.

Authorities on qualitative research agree on aspects of its general structure as flexible, interpretive, reflective, and reflexive (Creswell, 2009; Ellis, 2009a; Ellis, 2009b; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) names narrative analysis among the many approaches used by qualitative research or inquiry (e.g., phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory). The key to the narrative “is the use of stories as data, and more specifically, first-person accounts of experience told in story form... [including] autoethnography” (p. 32).

A key characteristic of both qualitative research and the narrative is reflexivity. It is central to qualitative inquiry in respect to the researcher’s political stance, self-consciousness, and introspection around interrogating social structures; reflexivity also comes with profound responsibility and a high level of risk to the researcher (Johnson, 2009). He explains that qualitative researchers have a dual role: “to have a consciousness of participation in the research but also a consciousness of reporting the research in self-reflexive ways” (p. 486). These two aspects create a particular tension, especially when the researcher speaks “from the margins” (p. 487). It is precisely from the margins that I will reflexively identify and interpret my values, my culture, and my biases (Creswell, 2009).

Reflexivity is essential to understanding our experiences as socially constructed, a view

that supports our engagement with our social world and the kinds of practices that can lead to critical change. According to Anderson and Glass (as cited in Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013), there is a distinction between reflexivity and *strong reflexivity* in the autoethnographic process. The latter is “an awareness of reciprocal influence between autoethnographers and their settings...self-conscious introspection guided by a desire to better understand both self and others through examining one’s actions and perceptions in reference to and dialogue with those of others” (p.73).

It is important to understand that reflexivity is a skill that can be taught. Teacher educators can help themselves as well as pre-service teachers to acquire the necessary tools that lead to uncovering reflexes that are assumptive. Moreover, they can learn how outside dialogue together with *self*-consciousness that is intentional can lead to meaningful social action (Cunliffe, 2004; Johnson, 2009). My own process of reflexivity has resulted in evolving political insights and more present relationships with my colleagues as well as with my students.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

*“I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten
about me, about you.”¹³*

– Gloria Anzaldúa, *Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World*

Women Writers (May 21, 1980)

Vignette 4: *Summers 1967-1969*

I was headed to the 10th grade, my first year of high school, when the Summer of Love rolled around. The 60s had already proven to be a decade made for the history books with the Civil Rights Act being signed into law, and the assassinations of JFK and Malcolm X. The Vietnam War raged on, and it was with the musical and political soundtrack of those years as a backdrop that I transitioned into critical thinker poet protestor sexual being. Always in New York, whether in Central Park or another accessible venue, there was a free concert to fuel my nascent political fire.

Returning home at the end of the day in early April of that following spring, I had just reached my stop when I learned of King’s assassination. Right there on that subway platform at 125th and Lexington it seemed that all of Harlem and I collapsed into a stunned river of tears. Late the following spring (still two years away from voting age), my need for political activism

¹³ From *Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers*, 1980, by Gloria Anzaldúa. In C. Moraga & G. Anzaldúa (Eds.), *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color* (4th ed.), (pp. 163-171). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

led me to the student ranks of Bobby Kennedy's presidential campaign; his life was snuffed out before I could attend the summer's first volunteer meeting.

The magnitude of these losses was not lost on my mother, who had a deeply visceral if not fully conceptualized understanding of the intersections of race and persecution; class and man's inhumanity to man. She was, after all, her immediate family's sole survivor of the Holocaust.¹⁴ To boot, she had married a Black man during a period in our country's history when miscegenation laws were upheld in as many as two dozen states (PBS.org). So it was only natural that, as the biracial Jewish daughter of an Austrian immigrant being raised—with my siblings—single-handedly in the projects of Spanish Harlem, I would begin to view the events of that time through a markedly prismatic lens.

The war demonstrations, sit-ins, love-ins of the late 60s happening in urban cities across America merged with the swell of Black consciousness around pride, activism, and the kind of beauty that had never been regarded as a standard for which to reach. As my mother came face to face with the emerging reality of her dashiki-clad Afro-wearing teenagers, she knew she needed to understand her children's evolution into this new awareness. So when we made our usual family trek to the 125th Street branch of the New York Public Library,¹⁵ rolling the squeaky two-wheeled shopping cart for the literally dozens of books we'd take turns dragging home, Mama interspersed her regular philosophical passions—tomes by Nietzsche, Goethe and Sigmund Freud—with books in new genres that included Black liberation and anti-colonialism. She read them first and then passed them on to me: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Frantz

¹⁴ While my mother had always *presumed* her immediate family (both parents, older sister, brother-in-law, and young nephew) were killed in concentration camps, she never had evidence of this during her lifetime. I began my own research more than a decade after her death, and confirmed her beliefs.

¹⁵ The East Harlem branch of the New York Public Library (224 East 125th Street) is located just off 2nd Avenue; it is, as of this writing, still housed in the same building.

Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (later, I would read *Black Skin, White Masks* on my own).

My mother had a way of balancing my literary diet with European classics by Kafka, Dostoevsky (*Crime and Punishment* took me the entire summer to digest), and Solzhenitsyn.

Preliminary Discussion

While I possessed neither the language nor the lived experience to understand the depth of what I was reading, my early consciousness about social justice/injustice was formed in the pages of those books and within the cultural milieu of late 60s Harlem and Manhattan's surrounding boroughs. In the two years before heading off to Bard College, I joined National Black Theatre, took lessons in Swahili at Brooklyn's LIU (Long Island University) campus alongside members of the Black Panther Party, and spent evenings occupying the site of the Harlem State Office Building¹⁶ while the Last Poets—with their jazzy staccato rhythms—surged streams of consciousness-raising revolutionary verse that helped birth the beginnings of rap and hip hop. I began to paint the world differently: other than rose-colored. And I looked to my mother to help make sense of my newly forming paradigm, woven with the powerful threads of my Blackness, my Jewishness, my Otherness.

Undoubtedly, my mother had the wisdom to know that she was nurturing that part of me that would respond empathically to those authors and their writings and create a space to begin constructing my worldview. And I did—in part through my own writings. The act of writing is what I observed throughout my early childhood and later youth, and it was something my mother nurtured in me. In high school it was further cultivated by the visionary guidance of a teacher

¹⁶ The Harlem State Office Building—later renamed Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building—was the site of major protests in 1969. Residents objected to the construction of the office building at the expense of neighborhood housing.

and poet¹⁷ through whom I learned to see writing as an art form. I began what would become a lifelong (and sometimes compulsive) pursuit – the keeping of personal journals.

Selected Data Sources

Creswell (2009) provides a description of the researcher's role as "explicitly [identifying] reflexively their biases, values, and personal background, such as gender, history, culture, and socioeconomic status, that may shape their interpretations formed during a study" (p. 177).

These aspects of my life experience are contained, in large part, in the data that will make up the largest component of this study: my personal writings. I have kept journals over multiple decades; the writings contained therein reflect much of my life. The reason May Sarton (in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) gives for keeping journals resonates with my own: "Journals are a way of finding out where I really am... They have to do with encounters... They sort of make me feel that the fabric of my life has a meaning" (p. 102). It must be noted that throughout the time I have kept personal journals there have been blocks of years when I did not.

My journal writing is contained in a variety of notebooks—bound and spiral; in memo pads—large and small. Sometimes it was just whatever paper source lived in my backpack or bag I carried with me to work or school. Other times it was the soft Sugar Daddy-colored leather bound journal with blank pages I received as a birthday gift from a dear friend. Or maybe it was merely what felt good to me at the time I needed to write. Feeling frenetic, off-center, or even despondent, I may have felt compelled to scribble quickly in too-large loopy script in the tiny,

¹⁷ Daisy Aldan (1923-2001) was my Creative Writing teacher in high school; we maintained contact throughout and beyond my college years (see letter, Appendix F). She introduced me to the writings of her friend, Anaïs Nin, whose collection of journals I began to read in high school.

four-by-six-inch lined notebook with a black and white cover that reminded me of Elsie, the first cow I met as a child. And every so often, in a bar or coffee place, I'd grab a napkin and that's where my insights, my ramblings and insecurities would land. Those, too, are honored here. Like the many cats (one at a time) and one dog with whom I have been fortunate to share years of my life, my writing has been my most constant companion. It has always been and remains what I rely on for comfort and solace, for self-actualization, and in many cases for spiritual stability.

Included in my data are photographs, each one encapsulating “a special memory in...time, a memory around which [I] construct stories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 114).

Among the writings that did not originate through my journals are: 1) memoir writings that were generated in 1997 during a 2-week workshop¹⁸ with Judith Barrington; 2) writings that came out of an elective course called Creative Nonfiction; oddly enough, the main text for the course was *Writing the Memoir* by Barrington; and more recently 3) blog posts for another elective course—Gender and Women's Studies, taken in the spring of 2014.

Much of the coursework in my doctoral program—and for the degree of Education Specialist—required me to reflect on particular assigned readings and post the reflections to an online class blog. My reflections would usually undergo a number of steps: writing them out long-hand in a spiral notebook or legal pad; typing what I had written into a Word document, usually with multiple changes; and at last posting the final version to the blog, where I might do additional revisions prior to hitting the submit button. In most instances it was also necessary to read and respond to others' posted reflections. (Usually, the same multi-step writing process

¹⁸ The Flight of the Mind Writing Workshop for Women (in Portland, Oregon) was co-founded by Judith Barrington, a memoirist, educator, and LGBT activist.

would be employed for my responses.) Some of the relevant reflections and responses count among my more recent written data.

There have been numerous educational seminars and conferences—some mandatory, others not—that I have attended while teaching and during my enrollment at universities for postgraduate degrees. Some of the thoughts I jotted down in random places are included as anecdotal notes; dates are included when known.

Among the electronic data are email correspondences with administrative or teaching staff at my local school. The privacy of individual colleagues past or present is respected in all cases where these data are used. In most cases, the emails are current within just a few years of this writing.

I have also included data in the form of personal letters (excerpts thereof) my mother wrote to me in my first year of college, prior to her massive (but not fatal) stroke.

Finally, over the course of the study—on an admittedly irregular basis—I reflected upon the process and my general feelings about the research. My reflections were jotted down or, more often than not, typed into an ongoing Word document I named “ReflxvBITS.” Less frequently, I just stored them “upstairs” (a term my mother used for “in the mind”) on the trust system. But could I really depend on myself to access that information when I needed to—*and from which schema file cabinet?* That “system” posed more of a challenge; thankfully, it was not one I usually relied on.

When taken together, all of these data combined contribute to the canvas that lives and breathes as this dissertation. Ellis (2009a) proclaims, “To connect the past to my life now, I add current reflections, narrative vignettes, and analyses...that fast-forward these stories to the present” (p. 12). There is never one way to examine one’s life stories; as I live and evolve my

narratives take on a new shape because I, as Ellis continues, “ask questions I didn’t ask then, consider others’ responses to the original story, and include vignettes of related experiences that have happened since I experienced and wrote the story and now affect the way I look back at my story” (p. 13).

Aside from reflections, reflexivity is essential to understanding our experiences as socially constructed; it is a view that supports engagement with my social world and the kinds of practices that can lead to critical change.

Data Interpretation

In his discussion of “ethnographic intent,” Wolcott (2009) describes the guiding principles for ethnographic studies, including themes focusing on culture, social structures and worldview, as a broad mandate where “purpose rather than method lies at the heart” (p. 36). At the heart of this study around negotiating intersectional identities against the context of social justice are intents that are wholly humanistic: to articulate contradictions, disrupt silences, create dialogue, and interrogate intolerance. For these reasons I have used the term “interpretation” for this section. Wolcott distinguishes between interpretation and analysis stating that the former derives from “human activity that includes intuition, past experience, emotion...[and] invites the reflection, the pondering, of data in terms of what people make of them” (p.30).

Loutzenheiser (2007) and Ngo (2010), who present the notion of *ambivalence* in ethnographic research, will influence the approach I take to interact with my data. They agree that neither words nor identities are fixed or easily (if at all) resolved. These are complex, inconsistent, and contradictory elements, for there are an ever-changing multiplicity of understandings upon which to draw to create meaning; and none remain stagnant. They both

stress the importance of the researcher's approach as being one of ambivalence. Britzman (as cited in Ngo, 2010) further crystallizes this conundrum; she describes it as intersubjectivity, where both ethnography and reality are impacted by the language we use to interpret the data we examine (p. x).

This reminds me of a transformational moment I experienced in the sixth grade. It was my introduction to critical thinking (although I didn't hear that term until decades later): the teacher showed a section from the film, *Rashomon* (Kurosawa, 1951). Until then, I had never witnessed a piece of art that was as drastic or as poignant, or which would have as lasting an impact on my psyche. Watching what unfolded on the screen, I knew (on a purely intuitive level) that a door had been flung wide open and that I had stepped into a new place of knowing and being. Over time, I came to realize that what each of us observes is sifted through the layers of our personal experiential journey; my perspective required no consensus—it simply *was*. How liberating! It also occurred to me that even that could change based on how I—and my belief systems—shifted and changed over time.

An interpreted reality will always be dynamic and in flux, as it is constructed subjectively, and is therefore messy and surprising. Ellis (2009a) furthers the understanding of this methodology as she explains the approaches to autoethnography as “flexible, reflexive, and reflective of life as lived; they do not follow a rigid list of rule-based procedures” (p. 16). This resonates with me deeply as I will interact organically with my data, and approach my writing in much the same way. Wolcott (2009) urges us to interact with the research in as many and varied ways as is warranted and/or available. We can only gaze through our own paradigms which will always be tied up in our lived experiences.

The following questions will bring focus to my gaze and help guide my interpretation as I interact with my data:

1. In what ways have I felt silenced, excluded, and/or privileged based on perceived Otherness?
2. How has my pedagogy shaped and been shaped by the intersectional spaces I occupy?
3. How can my personal narrative help to further change agency in a way that fosters more inclusive spaces for LGBT and other marginalized educators?

As a methodology that transcends self-narrative (Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2009a), it is my goal with autoethnography to confound and reveal [through my own stories] cultural issues in their complexity (Wolcott, 2009). I also want my writing to be compelling for the reader. In the view taken by Reed-Danahay (2009), this is possible when “autoethnographic writing confronts the tension between insider and outsider perspectives, between social practice and social constraint” (p. 32).

I will achieve the most meaningful representations for outsiders and readers through what Geertz (as cited in Bogdan and Biklen, 2007) refers to as “thick description.” Because it is culture and cultural data which I will be interpreting, it is only through writing filled with rich, multifaceted descriptions that I will be able to depict and richly illustrate for the reader the hopefully transformational meanings I want to share. Anzaldúa (in Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015) speaks with passion and eloquence to this point:

Change requires great heat. We must turn the heat on our own selves, the first site of working toward social justice and transformation. By transforming the negative perceptions we have of ourselves we change systems of oppression in interpersonal contexts—within the family, the community—which in turn alters larger institutional

systems... changes in the self lead to changes in the categories of identity, which in turn precipitate changes in community and traditions. (p. 264)

My stories are told from the margins. Within those margins are the multi-layered intersections through which I have lived and taught and loved. I know that to be fully engaged with my research and to allow others into a credible space means allowing my identities to surface, opening myself to an unusual degree of vulnerability. I also know that within this process lies an expansion of understanding about how we speak to and deconstruct the myths and institutionalized practices we as educators and as a society rely upon so heavily to maintain a status quo.

Credibility and Ethical Considerations

For purposes of confidentiality, pseudonyms were used (with two exceptions) in the vignettes, journal entries, and in the narrative throughout this study. Exceptions happened in the case of my own family members being named; additionally, in the case of known figures, where an Internet search would provide publicly available data on that individual. This is the extent of my ethical considerations for outside “participants” in my study. Internal ethics and credibility is a different matter, and poses something of an enigma in the broad scope of autoethnography.

My study is concerned with my lived experiences. My data and the process in which I examine them are executed in a solely qualitative manner and, specifically, in narrative form. As such, “the truths of autoethnography exist between storyteller and story listener” (Bochner, 2012, p. 161). And while facts in qualitative research—and certainly in autoethnography—ought to be verified, Bochner contends that it is the meaning and what the story evokes that is the burden of the social science storyteller – not the facts.

Gergen (2014) delved deeply into the questions surrounding validity in qualitative inquiry. He came to the conclusion that all too often—and mistakenly—the criteria that have been used for quantitative studies are applied to various forms of qualitative research. With regard to the attacks on autoethnography “for its unreliability, personal biases, and lack of generalizability,” Gergen argues “such critiques are largely unwarranted, as they essentially reflect the assumptions and values of traditional empiricism” (p. 55).

Fifteen years ago, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) understood that narrative inquiry as an approach to research was still an emerging field. They reflected even further back, to ten years earlier, when Connelly and Clandinin (in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) had observed,

Like other qualitative methods, narrative relies on criteria other than validity, reliability, and generalizability. It is important not to squeeze the language of narrative criteria into a language created for other forms of research. The language and criteria for the conduct of narrative inquiry are under development in the research community. (p. 184)

Arguably, not much has changed in this respect. It serves no valid purpose to have a single set of criteria uniformly applied across all communities of practice. More importantly, given the broad spectrum of research paradigms available to qualitative social scientists, it would be unjustified to assign any one with superior status (Gergen, 2014).

My study illuminates cultural meaning and understandings from a first-hand participant-researcher point of view. In this way, I place myself in a direct relationship with the reader in an “emotional, dialogic, and collaborative” (Bochner, 2012, p. 161) space. Credibility for my study is established when I have, through my writing, drawn the reader into a shared understanding of cultural truths, providing ever deeper empathy through, as Gergen notes, “*reflexivity* as a criterion of excellence” (p. 57).

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS (AND OTHER DISCOVERIES)

“All that you touch

You Change.

All that you Change

Changes you.”¹⁹

Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (1993, p. 3)

Life, and the *stuff* that comprises our lived experiences, is messy. This is merely my personal take from one who has lived this life. An observer’s observations. Life does not happen in a straight line. Nor, as we move farther from childhood and adolescence to reflect and recollect, do our memories. Those do not ripple calmly outward like symmetrical rings in a lake after it’s been met by a pebble tossed upon its surface; neither do memories proceed in measured fashion like footsteps imprinted in wet sand along a shoreline. Rather, they are like the notes and sometimes faltering rhythms of a saxophone—grasping, and then drifting away as if on a ribbon of smoke. A strip, a shred of memory right there in your mouth ready to be uttered aloud and then magically gone until a later time. Or who’s to say, maybe never.

This chapter is about the present and the past; it’s about making sense of how all those notes fit together. For you, the reader, the events and data I have chosen to include are laid out in chronological form. I learned once that the mind is a seeker of patterns and this notion comes into play here. As I wish to take you along on this excursion and not lose you in the process, the element of comprehensibility becomes important. With that said, I ask that you keep in mind the

¹⁹ From *Parable of the Sower*, by Octavia E. Butler, 1993, New York: Warner Books.

following caveats: although the chronology will follow my earliest years into my adulthood and up to the present (September 2015), the actual writing about certain past events will sometimes have occurred decades later. Precise dates will be provided for all data (letters, news articles, poems, earlier reflections or journal entries) when they are known. Whenever an exact date is unavailable I will provide the approximate year(s) preceded by ‘circa’. I have kept journals most of my life; as I combed through decades of writings, I found that much of what I’ve written is undated. I have only included such data when a relevant connection was apparent; completely unknown dates will be noted as such. Additionally, I have chosen to italicize certain entries.

There will be three entries for each piece of data (except where the data are related, and in those cases will be viewed as a set): the ‘Data Point (or Data Set) Introduction’ will briefly introduce the individual datum or set of data. Next, the datum itself dated and entitled in bold. The ‘Data Interpretation’ will be the final entry for the data point or data set, and that is where I hope to bring substance to what I am presenting here.

Thus, the linear timeline of aspects of my life that follows may provide a sort of roadmap for the reader. How you wish to proceed on this path is up to you. You may choose to follow along in the most predictable manner, following the years laid out before you. Or you may prefer to read the dates in reverse, beginning at the end of this chapter (chronologically, the most recent data and reflections). Choosing to begin the reading midway in the entries is another possibility. Throughout my life I have attempted to make sense of sometimes random-seeming occurrences by linking one event to another; it’s a way for me to create order—or at least the *sense* of order. Here, instead, I have focused on interpreting these data as they are presented. And where I come to understandings pertaining to my research questions and my evolution around this study, I will share with you my deepest insights.

Data Point Introduction

To scan it, I had to remove this photograph from the antique-looking frame that it lives in on my bedside table. Handling it in this way reminded me of how meaningful an image this one is for me. It's my favorite photo of my mother. And as I write this entry with her propped up beside me, I realize this is also the most telling image from my childhood.



In front of my childhood home: 315 West 99th Street, New York City

Circa 1957 – Riverside Drive

I am standing in front of 315 West 99th Street with my younger brother, Tayari (then Michael), and my mother. This is the earliest memory of home that I have. In fact, it is the same address that is noted on my birth certificate. I am dressed in a pinafore. This building where I spent my first six years of life is located not quite midway on the sloping sidewalk between West End Avenue uphill to the east and Riverside Drive downhill to the west. Even then, judging

from the innocent smile on my face, I was the consummate optimist. And, as I recall, the consummate pleaser as well. Tayari and I would walk hand in hand down that hill, and cross the street to Riverside Park. I recall doing this at a very young age, unaccompanied by my mother. (I must have been quite responsible given that scenario.) In the playground there were flat metal swings attached to heavy metal chains; there were smaller, squared ones with a protective bar for my brother. In the spring and summer the grassy green hills at the park were strewn with purple and pink clovers. There was nothing more thrilling for me than to lie down as straight as a stick at the top of the hill and then roll over and over all the way down to the bottom. The exhilaration of that utter abandonment coupled with the smell of the grass was pure joy and freedom!



The Paramount is a prewar doorman building situated on the prime Upper West Side between West End Avenue and Riverside Drive. The building is just steps from Riverside Park and the Hudson River. Playgrounds, tennis courts, green space, gardens and bike path are all very close to this building.

http://streeteasy.com/building/315-west-99-street-new_york

Data Interpretation

Sometime in my adulthood, I learned to my surprise that the building was an SRO (single room occupancy). I don't know whether SROs even existed when I grew up there in the 50s; it was a revelation nonetheless. And it was accurate: it *was* just one room for the five of us (at the time). Long before I made that discovery, it was clear to me that I had grown up "poor." It feels odd to use that word because on some level poverty is very much a construct. I believe many children understand poverty in ways that I did not. I don't recall ever *feeling* poor during that

time. Perhaps that was because for as long as I can remember Mama told us we were rich – *in culture and heritage*. That message would always include, “No one can ever take that away from you.” Cultural capital was what Mama had to give. It was what she had inherited naturally being born in the land of the Alps; of Mozart, Mahler, Haydn, and Strauss; into a middle-class Jewish family of translators and book publishers. And she was determined to pass that on to her children. Bourdieu (1986) theorizes that

the initial accumulation of cultural capital...starts at the outset...only for the offspring of families endowed with strong cultural capital [and that] the accumulation period covers the whole period of socialization [and] is no doubt the best hidden form of hereditary transmission of capital. (Embodied State section, para. 6)

The capital my mother instilled in me (and continued to reinforce throughout her life) was wholly symbolic—without tangible or economic worth. Yet, the value I inhered from the messages she transmitted and from the body of knowledge embedded therein was what gave me my earliest sense of myself; and what I then projected outward provided others with their perceptions of me.

A recent discovery: 315 West 99th Street, the holder of my fondest childhood memories, still exists. It has been gloriously renovated, and is available now only to those with substantial economic capital (see color photo and description).

Data Point Introduction

I am drawn to this photo and the need to include it in this study. As I contemplate justifying its inclusion, I realize quite simply that who and how I am as I walk through this world will always be connected somehow to my siblings. Because or in spite of them.

Circa 1961 – The Projects



The four of us (from left): Brenda, Tayari,
me and Barbara

Sometimes in New York City it snowed into the springtime. I have no recollection of the month or the season in this photograph, and can only guess at the approximate year based on the image. I imagine it was Mama who took the photo of us. All of us – even Mama – loved playing outside in the winter, and would look forward to building an impressive snowman (scarf and all) with the densely packed snowflakes. Judging from this image, I doubt whether we walked very far that day. But it is conceivable that we were heading back home after taking the bus downtown to one of the many museums we frequented (that in good weather we’d have walked to): Museum of Natural History, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of the City of New York, or the Guggenheim. Back then, all such venues had free admission. As an aspiring artist, these regular family excursions were my life’s blood.

Data Interpretation

It’s interesting that I entitled this photograph “The Projects” but never once referenced the projects. By this time, that’s indeed where we lived. But maybe not so much in my own mind. Or maybe where we happened to live was less important than how we lived and learned.

I learned something a long time ago about how to view the “art” in a photograph. First, there’s the design or configuration of the subjects – and often that’s not really an accident (regardless of who may have taken it); sometimes there’s a geometric shape that is clearly visible, and it creates a focal point. Then, there’s the interpretation. Mine, of course, may be skewed if I interpret it in a way that suits me. Here goes: my brother, Tayari (two years and six months younger than I), is the central figure in the photo; today, he is central to our family, and represents the patriarch. In the photo he and I are in the closest proximity relative to my older sisters. It is the same in life: we have a deep and abiding love for one another. (He is also the archivist in the family; while I’ve had these photos for decades Tayari is the one who originally provided them.) Brenda (three years and seven months older than I) has her hand on my shoulder; that may signify the support I have been for her. There is also a gaping distance between her hand and my shoulder. The differences she and I have experienced are many, but perhaps it’s our sisterhood that keeps bringing us back together, maintaining our connection. Barbara and I are almost exactly two years apart (another Virgo). She is the only one among us wearing a white hat (a halo?); also the only one with snow covering her coat. There’s a reflection of some kind above the car behind her which—along with the white woolen hat, and the snow that is on and around her—makes her seem aglow. She was always reaching for something on a higher plane. After college she left for the U.K. and has been traveling, teaching TM (Transcendental Meditation), and writing all these years. We were very close growing up, and although there was a great deal of sibling rivalry I did feel a sense of abandonment at her leaving, and for many years afterward. My youngest sister, Chloe, was not yet born when this photo was taken; I was nearly 14 when she arrived. We have formed a close bond over the years (even more so following the birth of her two children when she was in her early 40s). My oldest

brother and sister—Fred and Nonnine (five and eight years older than I, respectively)—were raised by their father. We got to know each other as young adults and developed our friendship and fraternal love over the years.

Data Point Introduction

This writing happened as a result of two separate assignments in two different courses at KSU over a span of two years. In 2011, I took the required course, Advanced Qualitative Research Methods. The assignment called for me to reflect on my earliest writing experience. I further developed that initial piece in an elective course, Creative Nonfiction, taken in the fall of 2013. Although the writing is recent, it harkens back to my pre-adolescence, and is dated as such.

Early-Mid 60s – On Writing

Watching my mother fill the pages of those tablets (mostly the ones that were unlined) as she lay sideways on her bed propped up on one elbow, I sensed purposefulness to her act of writing—always. I knew that what she did held some weighty dedication, and could also tell it was the only way she knew of rising above whatever was let out in her exquisite ink marks. Sometimes it would be my job to walk to the corner drugstore—when she knew she was close to the final pages of whichever tablet she was using (routinely more than one, for her multiple streams of thought)—and buy a new one for her. I wondered what she'd do with the cascades of thought and nowhere to put them. Stacked neatly on the wide shelving arranged perpendicular to the pharmacy window the tablets were easy to spot, the thin glossy red and white covers appearing so official. As I walked up front to the cashier I felt important – like I was then taking part in my mother's writing process. This was especially the case when I had to make some determination (based on what was on the shelf or the amount of money Mama had given me)

about the kind of tablet I'd buy: lined or unlined (by far her favorite), the one with the maximum number of pages (250 sheets was it?) or the thinner 100-page version.

My identity as a writer was formed in those endless observations of my mother; in her connection to the writing paper, the pens, and her swift impassioned strokes across every page. There was no back or front, only surfaces with the urgent need to be used. Page after page, once crisp but now softened at the edges and curved from being turned after a quick lick of the thumb. This too, a seemingly benign but integral part of her process, I watched and practiced. My mother's lyrical handwriting that I so loved and spent hours copying, and later knowing I'd nailed it when my forged excuse note to my sixth grade teacher raised not a hint of suspicion.

For my mother, there was no other place to go but inside. As a child, I had no words or understanding of that kind of journey; it was merely a given—as ordinary to me as watching her steaming hot tea steep in a tall glass. My own writing was a natural progression from what I had viewed to what I would ultimately choose to emulate about the woman I so idolized.

Data Interpretation

It was the tools of writing I first fell in love with: the pens, her colored pencils, and the lead ones; those came in varying scales of hardness. (Years later, even after I'd learned my way around the likes of Pearl Paint on Canal Street and could select the correct tools on my own, it was far more fun when Mama came along. She was the true expert and besides, I'd get such a kick out of watching her act like a kid in a candy store.) There was always a supply of those small rectangular razor blades at home; with these Mama would skillfully sharpen not only the pencils she used for writing and sketching, but the ones my sisters and brother, and I, would take to school. A deliciously chiseled point each and every time! I don't know whether all of these elements taken together fostered within me a love of writing and a need to draw. Rather, I

suspect they appealed to an inner sensibility that already existed when I arrived on this planet to be raised by the mother I was undoubtedly meant to have.

Data Point Introduction

Tayari has another photo of the three of us—Brenda, Barbara, and me—all costumed in biblical attire after returning from our Hebrew school play in Yorkville. Hebrew school was a significant part of my life in the final year of elementary school and throughout most of junior high school.



Sitting on the metal link fence near our building – after the Purim play

Circa mid 60s – Purim in the Projects

Not entirely accurate, because that’s not where the Purim celebration took place. Anyway, that day of the play I must have been feeling very proud, somewhat brave, and altogether theatrical to parade around the projects in such a costume in the full light of day. (Maybe my sisters felt the same way, and maybe we also felt there was strength in numbers.) Now that I think of it, Mama was surely championing us on. Nevertheless, we were consciously providing the neighborhood bullies with even more ammunition. We were picked on a lot, especially Barbara and me. Maybe it was because our “difference” was more evident, or maybe

it was because Brenda was known to fight back. We had all learned that little rhyme—*sticks and stones can break my bones, but words will never harm me*—from an early age, and used it (if and when appropriate) when we were taunted. Sometimes, though, it was better to just run away.

Data Interpretation

We were already viewed with suspicion, or disdain, or at least wary curiosity by many of the girls in the projects. Growing up, friendships were rare for me. There was a girl I remember fondly during the time we lived on 99th Street. She resided with her much older mother in a neighboring building. Sadly, our friendship was cut short. After we moved to the projects, around the time I was six or seven, I had no friends outside of school until my high school years. Before then, there was a girl in my class with whom there was a mutual admiration for the other's talents—writing, artistic ability, and spelling. I think she was as much of a goody-goody as I was, and we'd often meet outside and walk together to and from school. Much later, I realized I had never had a model for making friends: I could not recall a single friendship in my mother's life, for she had none. Her children were it for her – her anchor to the world.

Data Point Introduction

I found the following reflection in a top-bound legal-sized Cambridge pad with ruled pale yellow pages; it was dated 2/10/00. In February of 2000, I was living in Long Beach, CA; unbeknownst to me, I would be returning to Atlanta the following year. The event described here had a profound impact on me; it was something I carried around with me for years. I suspect this was my first attempt at getting it down on paper and trying to make sense of it.

Spring 1965 – “Half-breed” and a boatload of capital

“What are you?” was the most common way they’d phrase the question. Sometimes the question just sounded curious. Often, though, the edges were tinged with something else. At those times, I’d shrink inside. I knew they’d seen something. They’d detected something different. How? When I was older the angry attacks were also the clues to those differences, none of which I could change. “How come you talk so good?” “Where’d you get that good hair?” “Your sister’s real smart, huh?” I shook my head in futile denial though I guessed the neighborhood already knew she was headed to The Bronx High School of Science in the fall. “You think you’re better than anybody else ‘cause you’re wearin’ that dress?” Vicky was surrounded by her usual group of friends that day in the schoolyard; it was the day I wore my new sailor dress.

It was sleeveless and navy blue down to below the hips where the pleats began. They were crisp white and razor sharp. The sailor collar, too, was white and hung down perfectly squared in the back. The edge of the collar had thin red cording sewn all the way around, and a wide bright red sash was tied in a loose knot below the V-neck in front; another crimson sash around my hips separated the navy bodice from the pleated skirt. My “No” was a whisper as I slowly retreated, knowing the doors to the school were locked until the bell rang. Vicky then asked me for a nickel to buy an Italian ice from the bakery across the street. My other nickel was in the purse that was slung across my shoulder. “I don’t have any more money.” She hit my shoulder and told me to hit her back. I said nothing. She shoved me harder and I felt frozen in place. A crowd started to gather as she pushed me more violently and began yelling ugly remarks like “half-breed”—the most hurtful. Somewhere in the commotion my lemon ice in one

of those pleated paper cups fell to the ground. Vicky then punched me so hard in the stomach that I vomited my lunch. I wondered if I'd soiled my dress. After my mother went to school the following day I never had to worry about Vicky again.

Mama had a way of brandishing her unique form of cultural capital. In the projects of Spanish Harlem her sense of pride, disarming dignity, and European accent stood out like a sore thumb. And she knew when to make the most of it. Her biggest weapons, though, were her razor-sharp intelligence, uncanny grasp of the law, and a fervent inclination to always speak truth to power. So when Mama marched out of the house the next morning to meet with the principal I knew instinctively that I'd be okay from then on.

At JHS 45 (at least in those days) students were leveled according to reading ability; every grade from 7th through 9th had classes into the double digits. The higher the number, the lower the reading level. Highest-numbered classes were reserved for students with behavior problems, and those with cognitive and physical disabilities; the lowest-numbered were according to language elective, where odd (7-1) designated French, and even (7-2) Spanish, my class. Following a suspension, Vicky was moved from her respectably average single-digit classroom and placed in an embarrassingly high double-digit room; this ensured that our lunch and gym schedules did not coincide. She was also threatened with expulsion if she ever again laid a hand on me.

Data Interpretation

Even then I was aware of the unfairness of that system: Vicky wasn't stupid, just mean. I emerged from that afternoon in the schoolyard and its aftermath with insights that perhaps are still unfolding. Before even her first year of Junior High had ended, a powerful and equally negative impact had been made on Vicky's sense of self, her place in the world, and certainly her

academic future. By graduation two years later, Vicky had inched back only minimally toward the single-digit class she had once occupied. That gut-punch she delivered to me in the schoolyard was nowhere near as painful as the blow wielded by my mother – an outside actor, and someone whom Vicky would never even meet. But in some way, by extension, it was I who threw the final blow. The empowerment I experienced as a result of these events was profound and lasting.

My mother's innately good taste always picked up where the money left off. That is, the money from the semi-monthly public assistance checks. So, while it took me decades into my adulthood to understand concepts and practicality around finances, I didn't experience those same challenges with other kinds of capital – something my family seemed to have in spades. I often think of that sailor dress—the one Mama had bought for me at the Salvation Army; it cost no more than three dollars. But it was part of the outer and inner trappings that helped shape my identity and how that identity was perceived by others. There was never enough money for clothes in our family and barely enough for food, but outsiders (other than my teachers) would not have known that. It was the particular kind of “wealth” with which Mama had inculcated us and which we projected that likely was so threatening to the ‘Vickies’ in our neighborhood. Vicky would never know I was wearing a used garment that day or, as the youngest of three girls, most of what I wore to school routinely had been used by at least one of my older sisters. Of course there was more at play that day. All the stuff that's below the surface that needs just the right spark to set it aflame. Where was Vicky's mother in all of this? Where was her voice for her daughter? I don't know whether Vicky had siblings at home, but I do recall that she always came to school fashionably (and maybe even expensively) dressed. In this scenario, what was that really worth?

Data Point Introduction

My mother, being the progressive thinker she was and wanting to protect her children from further prejudice after the Yom Kippur incident (see p. 45) sought out a new synagogue. We ended up in the Bronx at a Black Jewish congregation headed by a Black rabbi. The tables had turned and my mother was now the only White face in a sea of much darker ones, and I think she felt quite comfortable and ‘in her element’ (a term she often used). We all attended the Bronx synagogue only briefly because traveling there on multiple subways and buses was so impractical. I located this article online during my research; it was published a few years after our attendance there.

7/25/69 – Ethiopian-born Bronx Rabbi Urges Full Acceptance of Black Jews

A 35-year-old Ethiopian-born rabbi urged the American Jewish community today to accelerate a recent shift toward acceptance of black Jews. Hailu Paris, who has been assistant rabbi at Congregation Mt. Horab in the Bronx, which serves some 50 black Jewish families, received a degree in Jewish studies last month from Yeshiva University and has started graduate work in Jewish education at the university.

“During the past 50 to 75 years, there had been a rigid non-acceptance of the black Jew” by American Jews but “in recent years, there has been a shift from the ‘old guard’ view of non-acceptance toward a ‘new guard’ position of greater acceptance,” he asserted. Enrollment of black Jewish youth in yeshivas in the United States and Israel was described as an example of this shift by Rabbi Paris but he declared that “too many Jews” still have “a social hang-up about accepting the black Jew.” He added that while some Hasidic groups “have expressed willingness to accept and integrate black Jews into their communities, the general attitude has

not yet evolved into full acceptance.”

He said such organizations as the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York had been instrumental in relocating many black Jews in white Jewish communities to give them the benefit of a “total Jewish environment.” Rabbi Paris, who came to the United States in 1936 during Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia, is a board member of Hazaad Harishon, an organization formed to help prepare black Jewish youth for acceptance into the white Jewish community. During 1965 and 1966 he returned to Ethiopia for contacts with the Falashas, the country’s 30,000 black Jews. He is a member of the Pro-Falasha committee of New York, which seeks to improve the lot of the Falasha Jews. NEW YORK (Jul. 24). In Jewish Telegraph Agency (JTA)

Data Interpretation

The decision of our family to take leave of our synagogue and Hebrew school in Yorkville happened around the time a significant event was taking place in Israel. As kibbutzim were springing up and settlers were pouring in, a plane filled with Ethiopian Jews landed there on an airstrip. They had come like so many foreigners before them to settle in their “promised land.” But for reasons associated with the color of their skin, that was not to be and they were refused entry. That year (our last), in Hebrew school, there was an opportunity for us to visit Israel. I remember we sat down as a family and discussed the treatment of the Jews from Ethiopia and decided we could not condone such actions by agreeing to participate in the trip. Besides, we could very well encounter the same racial prejudice.

The notion of *gaining entry* is something I’ve reflected on much of my adult life, growing up as a biracial Jewish female. Being denied entry into one’s very own culture/religion for not fitting the “physical profile” of those in the dominant culture has certainly contributed to my

attitude of ambivalence around Judaism. While I have tried on a number of occasions throughout my adult life to enter a traditional synagogue and feel welcomed, it was not to be. Those suspicious glances – prompting me to feel the need to explain my “membership” in the religion I was born into; and generating the same feeling of cognitive dissonance I experienced in the projects – contributed to the type of space I would rather not willingly occupy.

Data Point Introduction

By my last year at the High School of Art and Design, I had found my voice as an activist (as much as one could at the very threshold of adulthood). This was the result of my participation in National Black Theatre (NBT) in Harlem, beginning in 1968. My sister Barbara, the seeker, started there first and then urged me to join her. My recollections are current, not journaled.

1969 – Black consciousness and NBT

When Barbara Ann Teer (founder of NBT) invited me into the space she had created in the middle of Harlem, I walked into a world from which I had been shut out until then. It was a world that accepted my Blackness – no questions asked. The intentionality around the teaching and learning that took place in that narrow multi-story building was powerful and passionate. Learning about Black culture and Black activism through the vehicle of theatre would have been unique in itself, but doing so in that pivotal moment when there were such seismic waves in America’s world of culture and politics created massive shifts in my belief systems as well.

It was not unusual to be seated across from the likes of Stokely Carmichael and Miriam Makeba, or in the presence of H. Rap Brown, Sonia Sanchez, or any of the other iconic guests Teer invited into that space to speak with her students and the community (my mother attended

frequently). There was this other side of me, now validated in ways I was just beginning to recognize, and what I glimpsed in the mirror fit.

Data Interpretation

It was during this time that I began to wear dashikis, and I learned how to tie a gele (African head wrap), and wore them often in colorful patterns; and I let my hair mushroom into an enormous afro. Arriving for my final year at A&D in the fall of 1969 (obviously the most Afrocentric and, I imagine, the most militant-looking senior), I was asked—and accepted—an offer to lead the Black Student Union; it was a brief but significant experience in leadership. For the first time (aside from my literary voice, which had begun to develop under the instruction of Daisy Aldan) I felt I had something transformative to say, having taken what I had learned at NBT and synthesized it into a message I could share with my peers.

By that time, my work as an artist and writer was being valued by those whose work I also appreciated. My “outsider” status, at long last, was something I had chosen: I began to associate with other ‘writerly’ types (those who didn’t quite fit anywhere else), and it felt like a place where I belonged.

This data point kept drawing me back. This period, I realized, wasn’t just about donning a dashiki or even a newly formed Black consciousness. It was about a real inner shift regarding my identity. I began to feel a self-actualization that was new to me; along with that (or because of it) I began to embrace and honor my differentness. I had many facets—like a jewel—and they each shone in a particular light. It would take many more years (and trials) for there to be an understanding of the cohesion among the artist actor writer Black activist biracial Jew. But by the time I entered college in fall of 1970, I brought with me more than the neatly-packed trunk of

clothing, books, and mementos from home. I had the raw materials for what might be crafted into the framework for an independent life. That was to come much sooner than I expected.

Data Set Introduction

The data contained in this set are from three different sources. The first section is excerpts from a recent post: in 2014, I took a course in Gender and Women's Studies, where the initial requirement was to post a description of myself as a reader and writer; I also needed to include information about my education. In the second section are three poems. At Bard I saw for the first time loving relationships between women that didn't seem to be based on roles that felt out of place for me. While I knew no one would ever read them, I still felt the need to cloak the poems (first two) in secrecy, using coded initials for the crushes I had. The third poem (an excerpt) is for/about my mother. In the summer of 1971, before I was to begin my sophomore year at Bard, Mama had a massive stroke. The right side of her body was paralyzed, and she would spend the next 19 years in a nursing home, until her death in 1990. I found all of these poems in the stained manila envelope they've lived in since college; all were typed on onion skin paper, now faded and yellowing. The data set ends with a self-explanatory photo.

1970-1974 – Bard College/Mama/Baby

At the time I attended (at the tail-end of the hippie era), the colorful nickname for this school with its gothic stone buildings (our dorms) that had its roots in the Episcopal Church, and replete with porcelain claw foot tubs and brocade armchairs in the mahogany entryways was *the little red whorehouse on the Hudson*. The falls, in walking distance of campus, was a rocky waterhole where skinny-dipping was a common occurrence; and the field of magic (psilocybin)

mushrooms was aptly named *the enchanted forest*. When I arrived in 1970 the school had a student population of less than 250, and everyone knew who was sleeping with whom. Bard is located in Annandale-on-Hudson, beyond the reach of public transportation. After vacations, when I took the Harlem-Hudson line from Grand Central Terminal the two hours back to school, I'd get off at the Rhinebeck station and call a friend to pick me up, or take a cab due north and be on campus in under 15 minutes. But if I traveled an additional 15 minutes going west over the Hudson River, and a little farther north, I'd be in Woodstock. Yes, *that* Woodstock. So, although I'd missed the iconic "sex, drugs, and rock & roll" happening of the 20th century by a year, the element of proximity cannot be lost on the influence of that event on (my) life at Bard.

I had auditioned for Bard with two pieces—Hamlet (Act 3, Scene 2), and an original poem that I performed as a dramatic reading—and won a full four-year scholarship. One unforgettable evening there, I personally greeted Anaïs Nin after she read from her works at the Old Gym. She was a personal friend of my creative writing teacher in high school, where I began to read Nin's diaries.

For R.C.

*What brutal pain must I hear
to dance that ruffled black low-backed dance
of a woman...*

AH

*I want to walk with you far and in feet of sand
and in mouth full of song surrender...*

Before

*Before the sky
Before the sky got dark
I had to remember why
Not only the roses made me cry but the shovels too*

*O Rough Lady of bygone Alps
Of ruined Ivory terraces
Where might thy feet have walked*

*Though the mud has long broken and thine eyes
Have been cast against tomorrow*

*We hoped only in terms of bricks and ivy
And never a forgotten moment passed between our lips
Thy lips had always blushed and told the story
And thou may yet to kiss a hundred birds
From my soul*



**Miles at about 9 months and me
Blackstone, VA – Miles' paternal great-grandparents' home**

Data Interpretation

In August of 1970, Mama and I hugged and kissed and waved goodbye as I made it onto the northbound Harlem-Hudson line at Grand Central Station, headed for Rhinebeck, New York. I didn't know it then, but it would be our last time for such a farewell; the following summer I would be an orphan, for all intents and purposes.

I had received one of two Performing Arts scholarships that Bard awarded annually. Entering this small, somewhat exclusive liberal arts college on my own merits set me apart from some of the other students of color (of which we were few): many of them had been accepted through affirmative action; others came from the wealthy communities dotted throughout Westchester County. It quickly became clear that my scholarship meant little to nothing in the

face of the daunting intellect I encountered in my non-theatre classes. While I imagined I had received a reasonable education in the public schools of New York City, I had nothing to compare it to. Not until I arrived at Bard. Here, my cultural capital was superficial at best (context mattered); I was forced to work harder academically than I ever had before. At the same time, the stark reality of class and economic disparities was brutally apparent, as very real material wealth—to which I was a foreigner—existed in this idyllic setting. It was a lot to take in all at once, but my fortitude around other experiences with dissonance had served me well. There was no other choice but to simply move on.

After the first semester, I moved into the unofficial Black dorm, where I continued my (NBT) education into Black culture (e.g., learning about greens, and even how to cook them). Our tiny Black Student Organization wanted to mirror the larger universities who were doing sit-ins and staging protests to demand multicultural courses and faculty. I was accused at one such meeting of wanting to “dance through the revolution” because I was unable to align myself with the “down with whitey” rhetoric. The BSO never had an opportunity to flex its militant muscle because then president, Rev. Dr. Reamer Kline—a deeply benevolent being—granted every one of our wishes (including making the Black dorm an officially designated building on campus) with no conditions.

My writing flourished at Bard, and when I became pregnant in the spring of my senior year poetry seemed to seep from my pores. One of three pregnant seniors at Bard College that year, I was the only one who was unmarried. That felt perfectly right for me. Miles was born two months after I graduated. Choosing not to walk, I received my diploma in the mail that summer along with a personal, heartfelt letter from Dr. Kline (who had been my Hebrew teacher for two semesters). I have held onto that letter all these years.

Data Point Introduction

The date on the bottom-most doodle is 12/5/78. The other doodles are undated. These are among a few dozen that I've kept in my files, some on better quality paper than others. These doodles tell a piece of the story about where I was emotionally during those years. Overall, the tiny drawings on scraps of paper were among my only creative expression at the time. I was an artist who needed to create. And somehow to escape my situation by *drawing* myself out of it.

Circa 1978 to mid-80s – The art of doodling

The doodle that is centered here on the yellow paper is actually drawn on the back of one of those telephone [While You Were Out] message notes. What I wrote diagonally across the bottom is: *I am highly uninspired and hopelessly unmotivated! (in this place) and besides ~ I'm rather destitute...*



Data Interpretation

My life was in flux. Miles was close to four and a half; I had left his father the year before. I found a third floor walk-up (a “railroad” apartment) between Avenues C and D on the Lower East Side (also referred to as Alphabet City). I was grateful that the daycare was just a block away, and that Miles received breakfast and lunch there. More often than not, I would walk to work, usually all the way over to the west side somewhere in the Garment District. The number of random jobs I took to ensure the rent was paid (although it was often late) is too many to recall. I was an insurance clerk, an ad writer, a receptionist; I designed yokes in a trim factory, was a model for ready-to-wear (where middle-aged, cigar-smoking men pretended they were smoothing out the wrinkles on my dress...) and, regrettably, for *fur coat* shows at the Jacob Javits Convention Center. At some point during this time period, I also enrolled in the Lee Strasberg Institute; my need to continue to act was also my need for actualization. Through the roles I played I was recreating myself again and again. And that was something I felt a desperate need to do. At the end of what felt like an endless spiral of dead ends, I landed in a classroom.

I wish I could recall what motivated me to explore education in that way; I cannot. My first “fling” with teaching was at an elementary school in East New York, Brooklyn. I was placed, on a per-diem basis, in a fourth grade class. It was March or April of 1986, and the former teacher had simply walked out because the class was too unruly. I walked in on the first day dressed in a skirt and a blouse, nylons and pumps. I had a role to play—as an *actual* role model for these young students—and I wanted to look the part (as I had remembered it from my youth). More than a week into this brand new situation, I didn’t understand the odd looks I was receiving from the casually-dressed teachers (most of whom could barely be distinguished from their students). Finally, when a male teacher warned me jokingly not to trip on the stairs in my

heels I got the message (start dressing down). But there I was in an educational institution, *as an adult*, and I was still an “outsider within” (Collins, 2000).

For the next few months, I was pretty much on my own. Yet I managed somehow to get through to mid-June and the end of the school year. The principal invited me back for the fall term on the condition that I complete a pre-service course and certification test. I complied, and felt confident about the beginnings of a new career. I was assigned a mentor. What I was lacking, as I reflect on this period, was a *foundation* around pedagogy. I learned how to do running records, followed the basal reader “curriculum,” and taught writing by pure instinct. My art background made me a standout when it came to bulletin boards. But there was nothing to hold me; I hadn’t even decided why I was really there. I waited until the natural break of the winter holidays and quit. It was a swift burnout, if it can even be termed as such. I wouldn’t teach again for more than 10 years.

Data Point Introduction

After my move to Atlanta in 1990, I lived mostly as an actor. In 1996, I (along with other female actors and writers) was approached by a writer/director who wanted to create an original piece about marginalized women throughout history. He wanted original writing, and was hoping to pair writers with actors who would perform the works, and bring in directors to direct the various pieces. The following data point describes the project and my process. I wrote this for a blog assignment on marginalization in my Gender and Women’s Study course in 2014.

1996 – Marginal Women

How are we marginalized? Let me count the ways. I began to think about the notion of marginalized women in the mid-90s when I was involved in a theatre project in Atlanta; it was

entitled *Marginal Women*. We were a group of actors, writers, and directors who came together to write about and portray the lives of historical and present-day women who had, in some, way, been marginalized by society. What resulted was a collection of over a dozen portraits of women from a cross-section of culture/popular culture, time, and political/artistic space. Among them were Edmonia Lewis, a 19th century African American sculptor who attended Oberlin College during the Civil War and was accused of attempting to poison her roommates; she eventually left the States to study in Rome. Jennifer Levin, the 18-year old, brutally raped and murdered in Central Park in what became known as “The Preppie Murder”; the victim was attacked mercilessly in the press.

I was an actor and a writer in need of a character, and it quickly became apparent to me that I needn’t pluck one from the tabloids or the history books when the most salient example of a marginalized woman was the one I had known my entire life. She was my mother. Amalie Mimi Rosenfeld had survived the Holocaust only to arrive in this country and face persecution for her bold choice to intermarry. Writing her story brought me closer to my own.

Data Interpretation

I had actually begun to interview my mother when she was in the nursing home; there’s a recording of her on an old cassette tape. I listened to that tape and used its contents along with notes I had made. And I mined my mind, feverishly writing down every scrap of every story she had ever told me. When she was alive I told her often that I intended to tell her story, and she thought it was a good idea; she’d say, “Tell the story of my children.” I think in much the same way she found her identity through us, I find that I always tell my mother’s story when I intend to tell my own. For me the two stories—mine, hers—are inseparable. So much of my identity is couched in the story of my mother. In the telling about my mother’s marginalization, I tell about

my own; they are bound together, in a symbiotic web. I cannot say when or how this happened. It just is. In fact, a number of times throughout my life I have entertained the idea of changing my name to include hers. For it was she, not my father (a story for another time and place) who shaped who and how I am in this world. Perhaps it is this way of seeing our interwoven lives that informs my view of intersectionality.

Data Set Introduction

These data are in three parts. First is a photograph taken by my brother, Fred. I suspect he took it with his camera and sent me a copy. An excerpt of the application letter to The Flight of the Mind Writing Workshop in Portland, Oregon, follows. I located the letter in a gray, textured two-pocket folder in which live all things *Flight of the Mind* and *Marginal Women*. The paper folder had softened after so many years, and the spine was nearly separated; when I went through it to mine data for this writing, it came completely apart. The last part of this data set is a journal entry dated mid-July 1997. It was written in that soft, embossed Sugar Daddy-colored journal with blank pages. At that point I had relocated to Los Angeles (house-sitting for a director I knew), and was about to secure my own place in Long Beach. I had been driving around doing errands when I came upon an unexpected sight. I wrote this entry, as I did so many others around that time, while sitting on a bench overlooking the Pacific near the bluffs in Long Beach.

June 1997-June 2001 – Moving cross-country: Wherever I go there I am



Bainbridge Island Ferry (with my brother, Fred) on our way to his home in Kingston, off the Seattle, WA coast (June 1997)

[Excerpt of Letter to Judith Barrington, dated April 7, 1997]

The response to the performance was inspiring...One audience member, who didn't get that Mimi was "really" my mother, said that she sounded like "a really cool chic" and wanted to know where he could find a book about her. In writing about my mother I know that I must also write about myself...I need help at this point on how to proceed, what is safe to talk about, style, and much more...A thumbnail sketch of who I am: Born and raised in NYC, culturally rich, financially poor. Dealt with the harsh abuse and ignorance in my neighborhood for being "different." Dealt with the biting prejudice of the Jewish community downtown for being bi-racial. Dealt with all of it creatively – dance, art, poetry, theatre...

[Excerpt of Journal Entry, dated Tuesday, July 15th]

I need a home. But thank God I'm not homeless. I drove through L.A.'s downtown yesterday on my way back from the bank. It was like something out of a futuristic horror flick. Why futuristic? – because in some ways it was like after Armageddon! There were families (with

infants) literally sitting on the curb. I think maybe they lived there. It was horrible. Where is the help for these people?! In this land/this city of such awesome opportunity! How easy it is to never ever go down there—pretend it doesn't exist. What a heart-wrenching piece of reality. These people – these families need to be rescued. They need to be rescued. It was another land – another time another reality from even the worst neighborhoods I've seen here so far. But God how these people need to be rescued from that reality. But there are no magic wands – no fairy dust to make it all better...Abandoned by each person in every car that drives by day after day. Those who are on their way home from a day's work and those, like me, who got there accidentally and who'll remain disturbed for days afterward.

Data Interpretation

The photograph expresses the complete autonomy I felt as I traveled west to create a new life for myself. My first stop after leaving Atlanta was Santa Fe. There, I reconnected with my sister Nonnine; the last time we'd seen one other was right before she left New York with her two kids about 15 years earlier. It was late afternoon and pouring down rain when I drove up the muddy hill to her sky blue trailer. What a free-spirited hippie she was: the place was filled with lush exotic plants, and chairs and tables were draped with color-drenched fabric. Her birds were talkative and happy. That evening (or maybe it was the next) she ran a bath for me strewn with fresh flower petals. In my room surrounded by blue light was the Marianne Williamson "Our deepest fear" poem (which I had never read before), and a vase filled with stacia. It was as if I had discovered (or maybe rediscovered) a missing part of me in my big sister. I then drove northwest to Washington State. Fred and I met in Seattle before taking the Bainbridge Ferry to his home in Kingston. He had left Brooklyn (where we'd both ended up in the early 80s) and

traveled the world. When he returned years later, he resettled in Washington. It was my first time visiting him there. Among the rustic woods and rocky beaches, with his dog, he seemed in perfect harmony with his surroundings and his life.

Families happen in the way they do for reasons governed by the Universe. Who knows: had we grown up together, perhaps the closeness we feel now might never have happened. There is a soul connection with them and me (beyond the fact that we are all Virgos). They had placed between themselves and the rest of us a great deal of geographical space. Now I was.

I had been accepted to The Flight of the Mind Writing Workshop for Women in Portland, Oregon; it coincided perfectly with my move cross-country and I had orchestrated the stops along the way to fit like jewels along a pathway that would lead me home. After my week-long workshop on the banks of the McKenzie River, I drove south into California, my adopted state (but only, unbeknownst to me, for a brief four years). I was able to house-sit in the Silver Lake section of L.A. before finding my own place. I was journaling every day then, working on “The Artist’s Way.”

I think what made the sight of all those people living in the street so jarring was I had just driven through part of Rodeo Drive. Whatever fantasy I had been fed and/or envisioned of Los Angeles, it was thoroughly shattered in that instant. Once you see “the underbelly” there’s no going back. (For me, there never has been.) You can never then pretend it’s not there, that it doesn’t exist. Wherever there’s compassion there’s a response. It’s about humanity – *having* humanity.

In the application letter to Judith Barrington, I had written that I was “*culturally rich, financially poor*” and that I’d been able to deal with all of the adversity I had faced “*creatively*.” Did that privilege me in some way, allowing me to rise above what might otherwise be a far

more difficult Otherness in this world? And how did this visceral understanding of Otherness tie into my pedagogy?

When I began my longer teaching flirtation the following year (pre-NCLB, under a provisional license) with Long Beach Unified School District, I was in a different space personally and ideologically. I had made peace with my sexual orientation, and was “out” in my new community. I taught among other educators who were out. A colleague I’d met at the gay and lesbian center in Long Beach was a special education teacher a few doors down the hall; she’d be sure to point out to me every “bandit” (her comical term for a closeted LGBT person) who came into the school. The freedom to be exactly who I was (to colleagues as well as administrators) created a sense of harmony around the work I was doing. That acceptance—so representative of *blue* California on many levels—extended to the students. When one of my fourth-grade boys began to perform femininity (including wearing makeup and hair adornments), the topmost approach from the counselors and all involved was one of care.

There, on the West Coast, I got a bit closer (with courses, certifications, and experience) to understanding where I fit in this entity of education. I wasn’t there yet. And for other reasons home (Atlanta, another adopted place where family had settled) seemed like a better place to be. In “Land’s End,” Michael Cunningham describes the location of the ocean with, “though you can’t see it from where you now stand” (p. 40). That has been the case for much of my life; simply allowing things to take shape and seeing the meaning in those things at a later time. It reminds me, also in a figurative sense, of the scene that so disturbed me when I arrived: somewhere in that mass of people on the street there was hope. I am sure of that. That means there was possibility for renewal. Finally, I learned one day that many of my students in Long

Beach had never once seen the ocean or felt the sand between their toes. And the Pacific was less than two miles away...but *you can't see it from where you now stand*.

Data Set Introduction

On two separate occasions—once in 2003, and again in 2008—I sat in an audience and listened to Holocaust survivors recount their experiences. On both occasions during the Q&A, I asked the same question of the survivors. I am linking these data for that reason.

In 2003, a good friend of mine invited me to attend a talk by Dr. Ruth Kluger, who would be reading from her memoir, “Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered.” My friend was aware of the connections I could make, as both my mother and Kluger were born and raised in Vienna, and were survivors (though my mother was never in a camp). The talk was held in White Hall on the Emory University campus. After the talk, I declined my friend’s invitation to join her and an acquaintance for coffee, and instead went home and wrote. This entry is in its entirety; it is dated, and written in dark blue ink on a single sheet of unlined white paper.

In 2008, I attended the talk given by Elie Wiesel at Georgia State University’s Sports Arena. I jotted down notes the entire time he spoke, not wanting to miss any of the wisdom he was imparting (my mother had high regard for this man, and spoke about him often). Brief excerpts of those notes will be shared. I used a small spiral five-by-seven journal with a clear plastic cover; the cover is adorned with a whimsical bookplate (possibly a woodcut) in muted colors. In a style that evokes the art deco period, it shows a smiling crescent moon on whose lower tip balances a man on one hand. In the background are twinkling stars. I’m guessing I grabbed this journal because it was small enough to fit in my purse. There are still many pages left to fill.

1/21/03 – Holocaust by way of DNA I

On my mother's side, I am a first generation American. One generation removed. Why did her words make me cry – like Schindler's List: I couldn't go alone; had to see it with my brother Tayari. I feel at times, like a landscape juxtaposed, the way the earth was just after it broke apart... sunlight coming through my skin. Mama said she loved the color of my skin, like caramel – making me feel sweet, delectable. Kluger spoke of facing oneself; oneself as victim; facing the enemy; facing one's victimhood – or can it be called that? Sense of normalcy – underpinnings missing; sense of security absent. About information re: Holocaust – we feel we are told too much; or told not enough. I asked the only question I had inside: could you please say something about survivor guilt. A question of debt, rather than guilt. And what I had grown to expect: people turning around, wondering who with that voice was asking that question then seeing me – brown. That's all they'd know of me. They could wonder.

3/27/08 – Holocaust by way of DNA II

[Journal Excerpts]

What is a moral society and how do we build a moral society? It must be built again and again. The society must be able to say: We want to be a moral society. An immoral society is based on the belief that one is superior to another. Came to the South for the first time in the 50s, and for the first time felt utter shame for being white...same thing in Soweto – apartheid. In an immoral society when language fails, VIOLENCE becomes a language; power is used to shame another human being, to victimize, to imprison...In an immoral society, language becomes the first victim [because it's language that speaks to reason].

Book of Ezekiel – the shame of hunger – the cost of one missile could feed tens of thousands of hungry children in the world.

A moral society teaches morality in everything it does. It teaches by example. Ask: what is the moral dimension of [subject matter]? Education and culture are the shield. An educated society opts for moral priorities.

It is the “otherness” of the other that I want to respect.

Hope is something that you must aspire to, but it is essential to life. One can conceivably live without love, but one cannot live without hope.

Moral society...rebuilt every day, by every person – only if we are ready to accept the common ground of morality: that no one is superior to another – no one is inferior to another. Re: teaching “Night” – It happened. It could have been prevented. Jews were the victims of the action, but also of the indifference. Q & A – Illegal immigration: A human being cannot be illegal. Survivor guilt: I don’t believe in it. We didn’t do anything to survive; everything was done to us. The guilty should feel guilty and they don’t.

Data Interpretation

So, it was I who asked the questions about survivor guilt. I was asking for my mother (for the second time in five years) because I had always believed she *must* feel guilty about being the only survivor in her immediate (and briefly extended) family? And maybe I was also asking for myself – projecting myself into that picture to feel more deeply what my mother may have felt. Clearly there is that element. Or maybe her feelings were more aligned to Wiesel’s than I will ever know. As I read my notes these many years later, I think about how I compare what I feel to geography – unconnected, and I am able to see the parallels so clearly: Mama sailed away from her family at 19; parents were saving her, but it was the last they saw of each other. When she arrived here, she claimed she was “stateless.” I, too, became unanchored at 19 when Mama had her stroke. There was never again a home to which I could return. And then there’s

my Jewishness and the struggle to claim/reclaim it.

This brings to mind those old questions about Mama's parents: that her mother and father would not have accepted us because of our brown skin. (She'd say that often with great assuredness.) Yet I have never felt an emotional absence around that contention, and I guess it's because I have never believed that to be true. How could a grandparent not love their grandchild? I think what is more accurate is that they would not have condoned her marrying and bearing the children of a Black man. I suppose I could tell myself a million different stories about this, and always be protected from potential pain because I'll never know the answer.

There is this aspect around my identity for which there remain surprisingly unanswered questions. Or maybe just a disappointing lack of resolution. Shouldn't I be okay with all of this by now? Do I not have the capability of crafting my own answers to whatever questions remain? Of course I do. How do I expect the channel (to what/to whom) I keep open to be filled?

Data Point Introduction

One of my final courses at Georgia State University, where I received my M.Ed., was Cultural Issues. It was up to each of us to choose an issue that resonated with us and not only research it, but take a real-life activist stance on the issue by writing to a policy maker. As I was preparing to be a middle school ESOL educator, I was deeply moved by the events that were playing out nationwide with respect to immigration. What was happening in Arizona was particularly troubling. I kept a black 1-inch three-ring binder of all the news clippings and other findings (all in sheet protectors) around my topic. Included is a copy of the certified letter I sent to House Democratic Leader, Nancy Pelosi. Following is an excerpt of that letter.

April 30, 2006 – Dear Madam

I am writing to you as a former resident of California...Over the years, I have respected the ways you have demonstrated conviction in your beliefs by courageously standing up in the face of opposition and making your voice heard. On the issue of immigration, your push to enact family-centered policies that will re-unite families rather than further tearing them apart is both reasonable and humane. It is on this topic that I write today, and I thank you in advance for hearing my voice.

One of the rewritten lines in *Nuestro Himno* – the new Spanish version of *The Star Spangled Banner* is “My people keep fighting. It's time to break the chains.” Well, the human chains formed across thoroughfares in New York’s immigrant neighborhoods will already have happened when you receive this letter. It’s very likely those human chains will include sons and daughters of those Asians who were rounded up and forced to spend years in our Japanese internment camps. Holding their hands may be American citizens of Middle Eastern descent who were shunned and beaten after 9/11. There’s a quote by Martin Luther King Jr. on www.immigrantsolidarity.org: “Never forget that everything Hitler did in Germany was legal.” Holocaust Remembrance Day, which happened less than a week ago, is about never forgetting. The parallels are inescapable. Will “A Day Without Immigrants” help us remember how important our neighbors are? ... Will those voices have fallen on deaf ears? Will the economic power of so many living in the shadows finally be felt? For those who are engaged and attempting to unravel the many layers of the immigration issue in order to find some resolution, debates have been heated but healthy. Others – for whom there are no questions, only the narrow confines of ethnocentrism – are filled with disdain. For them it is easier simply to point

and say, “*You don’t speak the language. You don’t have citizenship. You don’t belong here.*”

Many would consider this attitude patriotic.

For me, an ESOL teacher in the public school system of Georgia, immigration has a distinctly human face. I have seen that face filled with fear over rumors about immigration officials coming into the schools to snatch up illegal immigrants or the children of illegal immigrants; worse yet going into their homes and imprisoning or deporting their parents...Many of these children already return to empty homes because their parents are forced to work multiple jobs due to dirt-cheap wages. But they are the same children who go on to earn higher degrees and make a difference in their communities, become change agents in schools and earn seats in the government of this country we call America.

Legal status aside, the immigrants who demonstrate tomorrow are part of the fabric of this nation. Just as the generations of immigrants before them, their collective voice is stronger than even they are aware. These protests are their first steps toward necessary change. Though I do not presume to have an answer to the jigsaw puzzle that is illegal immigration, I do know this: if immigration reform in this country is to be meaningful, that human face must be a part of the decision-making processes that allow reform to take place. You said it well when you stated, “We must ensure that immigrants are not treated as second-class citizens and that avenues are available for citizenship.” You went on to call for the kind of reform that respects the values that any citizen of the world, indeed every citizen of the human race, should be afforded: “family unity, fairness, and economic opportunity for all.”

Data Interpretation

As I read this letter that I wrote nearly 10 years ago, it troubles me to realize that nothing has changed on this front. In fact, the realities of the human costs around this issue far beyond

U.S. borders have brought immigration discourse into harsh new focus. I cannot help but view the plight, the policies, and the potentials for immigrants from the perspective of who I am: the child of a naturalized U.S. citizen. With that said, it is a distinctly personal viewpoint and one that embodies the multiplicity of my identity. Immigration, in particular, cannot be viewed one dimensionally. It is not only important to *see* those we are teaching in our classrooms, whose parents are cleaning our homes and trimming our lawns; we must see ourselves as well, and take stock of our history/our actions in the face of difference.

Can we truly understand today's immigration challenges without refracting through that lens the Japanese internment camps scattered over as many as six U.S. states slightly more than a half century ago? A similar misplaced hysteria and lack of outrage among American citizens has allowed the U.S. government to detain uncharged prisoners indefinitely at Guantanamo Bay. At the same time, eruptions of fervent support in the name of patriotism are still all too common in the face of calls to eradicate all who are unlike—in worship or language or culture—*itself*. *Itself* being those in the dominant culture who embody the characteristics of extreme ethnocentrism (superiority, and denigration of others – often found in the defense stage of Bennett's DMIS; see reference on p. 6). I think that it is okay not to have answers around this issue; it's complicated at best. But regardless of whether or not we can demonstrate agency—through support or dialogue or anything at all—we must acknowledge that we are all somehow connected to this issue. This can never be about “them” and “us” because we all inhabit the same space.

Data Point Introduction

In my 2014 Gender and Women's Studies course, I had to watch the 1997 Berliner film, "Ma Vie en Rose," and post a commentary on the class blog. What came out of that assignment surprised me.

[Blog Post Excerpts]

2/17/14 – Being...Naming

Along with teaching English learners (ELs) in Cobb County came massive amounts of paperwork and official documents to be completed. Although permanent records were available, when it came to filling in students' demographic information the veteran teachers were used to relying on one another and their (often presumed) knowledge of their students. I had just moved to the county from another school system, so I was aware that challenging a colleague's judgment would not be well received. But in the instance when I did I felt I had no choice: it had to do with a teacher's presumption regarding a student's racial identity. The student in question was from Brazil and, based on discussions around culture that I'd conducted with my 8th graders (she among them), this particular student identified as both White *and* Black. The teacher in this case insisted on marking only the box for White, purely on the basis of the student's skin color. She questioned how I could dispute something so "obvious." I, in turn, questioned her need or willingness to impose a racial identity on a child who might view herself differently – based on criteria that may not be so readily apparent.

We are a society that is used to naming (based on commonly held stereotypes) and labeling—in very binary "black and white" terms. Should people be categorized in so expedient a manner, giving little to no regard to the object of the naming? And what is the purpose of such naming –

the preservation of our own comfort level? Or something more insidious, such as who has power over whom? In the preceding example, I was the only teacher who questioned what was transpiring. Was it merely a coincidence that I was also the only teacher of color present?

This story is apropos to this week's discussion of transgenderism in general and the film, *Ma vie en rose*, in particular. On one hand there is the object, often (if not always) in possession of a certain level of clarity around identity. On the other hand, there is the subject—society, or individuals thereof—with the (often unbounded) drive to designate and classify the object of difference, confusion and, in many instances, disdain. And although Berliner's film was released seventeen years ago, *Ma vie en rose* continues to debunk cultural stereotypes around what it means to be transgender.

The film forces its audience to care about this subject in a way that is perhaps unfamiliar, because the central character here is a child. Berliner poses the unasked question: *is this 7-year old child doing what comes naturally, or choosing to be a societal anomaly?* Viewers must come to terms with the pure innocence and authenticity of Ludovic who, it is clear, believes he is a girl in the wrong body: that of a boy...Ludovic...acknowledg[es] an innate realization that the body didn't match the being. The Queer Terminology definition for *transgender* supports this: "This term is developing a more specific meaning to people with opposite gender identification..."

Data Interpretation

I believe the most critical questions around this subject are: *Who gets to do the naming? Who gets to identify/classify whom?* My thoroughly *nonacademic* and purely subjective answer is: Not you. Each of us has the power and the right to name ourselves, or to *self-identify*. That is not a right that should be extended to others, nor should others feel they have the power or the right to

classify, name, or even judge another's gender, race, ethnicity, or beyond. Think of the possibilities toward a more socially just and equitable world.

Data Point Introduction

My final day of post-planning had come and gone, and I was hoping to move into a different position with the County. The following email which I sent to family members describes what occurred.

5/29/15 – Surprises and normalcy

Subject: Who knew...Certainly not I!

Dear Family,

As I prepare to complete my dissertation, I have also been considering ways to navigate the potential fallout after it is published on the Kennesaw University website (I've shared those thoughts with some of you). Checking for vacancies every few days, I saw that an administrative position has just been posted for Griffin Middle School. Not one to blindly apply for a job, here's what I found as I researched the principal of that school. Please read the attached article.

http://mdjonline.com/view/full_story/26371465/article-High-hopes--Griffin-Middle-fills-in-blank-in-appointing-new-principal

It appears I have far less to be concerned about than I initially realized. What a revelation (to be included in the findings/discussion sections of my study)!

Sweet dreams ~

Data Interpretation

In the MDJ (Marietta Daily Journal) of all places! Right here in Cobb County: an *OUT* gay principal who, with his husband (yes, they used "husband," and I did a triple-take) were preparing to adopt a child from Asia. My initial thought after reading the article was to set up an appointment with him and just drill him on how it happened. How were you able to manage

this...*outness*? What have I missed/been missing all this time? Why did I not know this was possible in Cobb County – to be a male principal with a *husband* – in the MDJ? And the sky doesn't fall. What have I been making up in my mind? And why? Have I gotten so used to barriers that I set them up where they wouldn't otherwise be?

Sometimes I think I am a very naïve person. The ways of the world just escape me. I may as well be living in a mushroom or maybe just off the grid somewhere. In the forest in Seattle with my brother Fred. Everything is such a big deal, and nothing ever is. My mother always said, "There's nothing new under the sun." Nothing truer – not at this moment.

Almost immediately following my sense of exhilaration was the reality: not deflation, just the normal everyday reality of a man and his husband. Isn't that what we're all going for: the *so-what-big-deal*-ness of all of it all?

And then, of course, I thought would this/could this be possible for the Black male principal, the Latino AP, or for me? Perhaps it was this man's *facility* with access (a benefit of Whiteness, in general) that allowed him to just be. Whatever the reason, I could only answer *yes* to my own question, above. We have to give ourselves permission to "enter." And the truth is, in my own experience, the moment before coming out has always had a far greater fear factor than the moment itself. Except for once (when a friend of mine broke down in tears), my news has always been received as a non-issue.

Data Set Introduction

These final two entries were written following the much-awaited Supreme Court decision that happened in the summer of 2015. These are from the journal I kept following my May proposal defense. My notes were written in a gently-used notepad with lined white sheets.

6/26/15 – Dignity by any other name...

SCOTUS: Same-Sex Marriage Obergefell v. Hodges; Justice Anthony Kennedy's majority opinion; White House enrobed in pride colors/rainbow lights – *for real???* Really, I thought it was one of those duped photos. I only saw it fleetingly this evening, and I didn't think it was real. It's real! Security. Equality. Dignity. SCOTUS legalizes Same-Sex Marriage! DIGNITY is the word of the day today. DIGNITY. The majority of those who spoke about the SCOTUS decision mentioned Charleston—because they all saw a connection!!! “The Constitution does not stand by laws that disadvantage people.” It's the way Kennedy spoke about his opinion: *the nature of marriage having intimacy and spirituality*. So much dignity, so much respect in his words – what has changed is not the constitution, but our knowledge of what it means to be lesbian and gay. Can you call this anything but wise? What is humanity if there is no evolution in our knowledge? Why do I feel like I'm asking more questions than I intended to?

7/ 9/15 – Architects for our time

It turns out that Mary Bonauto was one of three lawyers who made marriage a constitutional right – one of the architects of same sex litigation. Evan Wolfson, by the same token, was an architect of the marriage equality movement. Their roles were different but their actions dovetailed into what has become a completely red (the *good* kind) map on the Freedom to Marry site! Listening to these two on NPR is quite eye-opening – quite an education in how to orchestrate a skillfully maneuvered plan! (This was Wolfson's thesis in 1983. Imagine.) It turns out the plan was to move the court of public opinion WHILE making the case for a constitutional right in the Supreme Court. How well they strategized! And thank G-d for enough reasonable

minds where they count! Bonauto said something wonderfully profound: “The opposite of stigma is dignity.”

Data Interpretation

It felt like a gift to be facing the summer break following the defense of my dissertation proposal in mid-May. In the weeks after my defense, local and national news focusing on upcoming SCOTUS decisions (particularly on same-sex marriage) buzzed with electric anticipation. There was an air of excitement about the magnitude of so many important rulings happening within just days of each other – so many possibilities for change, for evolution. And then out of nowhere—Charleston. I was in New York with my son and grandson and no visual media (outside of my laptop, being used only for this work) when my sister, Nonnine, called me in tears. Nine people killed. Nine Black people. In a church.

The juxtaposition of such horrific tragedy against the subdued joy—around the Confederate flag (again, out of nowhere), plus ACA subsidies and Housing Discrimination—in the nine days that followed was disconcerting at the very least. And then to watch Obama after the Same-Sex ruling on the very day he was to give Pinckney’s eulogy; the empathy I felt for him in this moment was overwhelming.

And it was a week of unfathomable intersections: The Black church/the language used by Justice Kennedy (*spirituality*) to describe same-sex marriage; the denunciation of the Confederate flag/White right-wing Republicans aligning with left-wingers and Black people everywhere; the White House lit up in Pride colors/the Black President closing his eulogy with a gospel song in a Black church in SC. And the word that ran through it all like an endless silk ribbon was *dignity*. One would have to be blind not to see that as the unifying theme (and the amazing grace) in every bit of dialogue that took place in those final weeks of June.

More than a week later, I was finally able to let go of the news cycle. I ended my obsession on a meaningful note: NPR's *Fresh Air* with the architects of the same-sex ruling. What an education in strategy – I will certainly listen to this talk again on a podcast. It was surprising—but understandable—to learn that Wolfson would be closing his Freedom to Marry site. Butler's quote that I used to open this chapter came to mind. The number of lives he has touched (and changed) over the years is uncountable, to be sure. Allowing that site to end is an evolution in itself.

In the end, how lovely it was to hear Bonauto talk about *dignity* in the way that she did; to think about the notion of stigma in this way... This is one of those phrases I just have to sit with, and there is not a more suitable way to complete this chapter.

"The opposite of stigma is dignity." Mary Bonauto

CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION
(THE STORIES CONTINUE)

*“It always comes back to the same necessity: go deep enough and there is
a bedrock of truth, however hard.”²⁰*

– May Sarton, *Journal of a Solitude* (1973, p. 150)

There is no way I could have guessed when I began thinking and writing about these topics in 2011 that the culmination of my work would coincide so auspiciously with what is arguably one of the most meaningful and life-changing Supreme Court rulings of this century. In a 5-4 majority, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) decided that the Constitution guarantees the right to same-sex marriage. Using impassioned speech, Justice Anthony Kennedy (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015) wrote the majority opinion:

No union is more profound than marriage, for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice, and family. In forming a marital union, two people become something greater than once they were. As some of the petitioners in these cases demonstrate, marriage embodies a love that may endure even past death. It would misunderstand these men and women to say they disrespect the idea of marriage. Their plea is that they do respect it, respect it so deeply that they seek to find its fulfillment for themselves. Their hope is not to be condemned to live in loneliness, excluded from one of

²⁰ From *Journal of a Solitude*, by May Sarton, 1973, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

civilization's oldest institutions. They ask for equal dignity in the eyes of the law. The Constitution grants them that right. (p. 33)

I open this final chapter of my dissertation with this ruling because the spark for my study was ignited by what I saw as a lack of dignity around the rights and humanity of those in the LGBT academic community. That notion spiraled inward to address how my particular ways of identifying in multiple and marginal contexts—socially, racially, and culturally—impacted and informed my pedagogical lens specifically, and my worldview in general. These ideas lie at the heart of this study and are, in essence, the purpose for the study.

Using elements of autoethnography (Ellis, 2009a) to examine these issues positioned me “at the intersection of the personal and the cultural, thinking and observing as an ethnographer and writing and describing as a storyteller” (p. 13). I applied a narrative approach to support the communication of my first-person experiences sometimes in story form (Merriam, 2009) and, in other cases, framed as a vignette. The narrative approach was important from the beginning. It has always been my desire to write in such a way that would feel natural to the reader; this quality would make it accessible and give the reader an opportunity to not just engage with, but also interact with, the narrative in a fully authentic manner. As this process took shape, a second consideration evolved having to do with epistemological framing (Russ & Luna, 2013). In an educational setting, epistemological framing “is how a participant thinks about knowledge as it relates to teaching and learning” (p. 286). This is directly related to the study's significance.

Significance Revisited

My audience for this study is educators, particularly those who teach in K-12 settings; pre-service teachers; and teacher educators throughout the academy. Given the reader's ability

and willingness to interact with this study's overarching theme of social justice and its constituent elements, the reader would conceivably be able to reimagine and help construct a society that aims to rid itself of intolerance and injustice in order to become more equitable and inclusive. With that, our institutions of learning would be spaces where the marginalization of difference and ideas would have no place, but critical ways of understanding and expressing knowledge would flourish.

Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) support this notion that centers on critical thinking around one's relationship to knowledge for the purpose of taking social justice action. In their discussion of the multidimensional aspect of knowledge (how we interact with it or invest in it socially and politically, for example), the authors express that "thinking critically requires the ability to recognize and analyze how meaning (knowledge) is socially constructed and infused with ideology" (p. 3). They further exemplify this with how a teacher might (1) present Christopher Columbus discovering America as neutral or accepted; then (2) move to the myth of Columbus within the broader context of the continent based on the teacher's own "critical self-reflection" (p. 7) and social/racial/ideological lens; and, at the final stage (3) use acquired understandings and skills to challenge and even rewrite a curriculum grounded in dominant structures. What is described here is an evolution in how teachers impart the knowledge they are charged with delivering. Where are you on this evolutionary spectrum? And how are your students impacted by your relationship to knowledge?

Knowledge, of course, does not exist in a vacuum. And although there are many paths one can take to arrive at understandings around pedagogy one's ideology will always lead back to the authentic relationship one has to and with the *human* family. That is a relationship, according to Paulo Freire (1970/2000), that flourishes through the use of dialogue that is truthful

and transformational. Freire further insists that without “a profound love for the world and for people...because love is an act of courage, not of fear, [and] is commitment to others” (p. 89) the existence of dialogue would not be possible. It may sound incongruous to speak about education in terms of truth, love, and humanity. But a political philosophy of education—as mine is, and largely influenced by the work of Freire—is at its core about the work of transforming, which is about humanity; and work around humanity is inherently undergirded by love. These ideas resonate with me and my intent for this study at the highest vibrations. Might it be possible that through this study you will consider other ways to enact the work of education?

Themes Revealed

It was through reflexivity, or the act of self-conscious introspection for the purpose of interrogating social structures (Johnson, 2009), that I interpreted the data and explored themes that emerged from my autoethnographic study. Reflexivity is considered a tool that is essential to understanding our experiences as socially constructed, and supports practices that can lead to critical change.

Throughout the narrative, and in the vignettes and data that were shared, *identity* was pervasive. Impacting that theme were the notions of privilege (and lack thereof), including associated capital; gaining access (and being prevented from gaining access); and naming, specifically labeling (usually *othering*) by outside parties. Another theme that figured prominently in this study was Judaism or, more precisely, *my Jewishness* and my sense of where I was located within that cultural-religious framework; also how those understandings (and questions) aligned with stories connected to my mother. It is a theme that I will examine on its own, along with its intersectional component of *identity*. I was surprised by how prominent a

theme *family* was in this study; it seemed to be threaded throughout this work and felt somehow like a unifying force. While family is highly relevant to me, I don't feel the theme itself extends the focus of this study. However, it is significant in the context of the personal narrative, and I will devote some discussion to this, albeit brief. Finally, beyond the opening vignette, a terse description of my teaching experience in California on page 93, and the final pieces of data, *LGBT issues* did not emerge as a significant topic; this does require discussion.

The following three questions guided this work:

1. In what ways have I felt silenced, excluded, and/or privileged based on perceived Otherness?
2. How has my pedagogy shaped and been shaped by the intersectional spaces I occupy?
3. How can my personal narrative help further change agency in a way that fosters more inclusive spaces for LGBT and other marginalized educators?

As I discuss each of these themes, I will do so using my unique perspective of an autoethnographic researcher whose identities are reflected through fluid intersectionality.

Identity

On my mother's side, I am a first generation American. My mother, a native of Vienna, came to the U.S. as a refugee and the only person in her family who survived the Holocaust. In New York City's Spanish Harlem, where my siblings and I were raised we were one of only two biracial families. At our Hebrew school there were no other children of color. My lack of capital in some respects and abundance in others led me to understand early on what it means to live in the margins of society. My lived experiences as a biracial Jewish lesbian have posed countless challenges in terms of how to navigate spaces—many of which allowed, but did not

invite access. It is illuminating but not altogether surprising to consider where I have placed my focus as an educator – teaching English language learners. Like me, many of my students grow up straddling two or more worlds, where notions of color, culture, class, and capital impact their daily lives. Like my mother, they must navigate between and within two distinct sociolinguistic worlds. Gay (2010) asserts that language “identifies and humanizes, and gives cultures, ideas, and thoughts the capacity to speak” (p. 76). But with the desire for assimilation (often for the purpose of gaining access to certain privileges) language learners must contend with balancing that desire against the sometimes ambivalent choice to honor the culture and language that sustains them. My mother all but lost her first language in the face of such challenges.

One could say that mine is a story about Otherness. For me, however, the veracity of that statement would lie in someone else’s perspective – not mine. That is because Otherness can only find truth in opposition to that upon which has been placed greater value or significance. It is true that I have occupied spaces within and between multiple racial contexts. It is also true that I have been an unwitting participant in my own labeling and identification by those in dominant as well as dominated cultures. While unknown to me, the purposes for those actions fulfilled or suited the needs of others. Such impositions require no qualification on my part at this point in time. But suffice it to say I developed what has come to feel like an inherently complex understanding around my identity. Alcoff (2006) states that “the experience of having mixed or ambiguous identity teaches lessons early on about the fluid and at times arbitrary nature of social identity designations” (p. ix). As a result, my notions of identity and intersectionality resonate more deeply with my biography.

My Jewishness

For much of my life I have experienced a particular and distinct level of cognitive dissonance in relationship to my Jewishness. In somewhat the same way that Collins (2000) describes the notion of being an *outsider within*, what I perceived as a lack of access has been the most troubling for me because it seemed to threaten the profound connection that I have with my mother, and all of the exotic pieces of history tragic and joyous that I had yet to piece together. That aspect of my discord is what I found most revelatory (pertaining to my Jewishness) in the process of conducting this study.

In what has been an ongoing striving to find resolution I am reminded of how close I came just a few short years ago. This came as a direct result of a course on intercultural communication that I took towards my Education Specialist degree. When I found Rabbi Joshua Lesser and Congregation Bet Haverim (CBH), I found the unlikely opportunity to address and embrace the broad scope of my identity within the contexts of religion, culture, and sexual orientation. The link for Lesser's organization, called The Rainbow Center, welcomed every stripe of sexual orientation (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and straight) who needed a resource for their "religious and spiritual traditions" (www.therainbowcenter.org, replaced, I believe with <https://congregationbethaverim.org/content/youve-come-long-way-bubbeleh>). I felt that my sexual orientation and lesbian identity were non-issues; it was the religion and ethnicity and the often-troubling convergence of the two that I needed to explore again and try to put to rest.

When I met with him, Rabbi Josh and I talked about my mother's heritage and he explained his own Ashkenazi Eastern European background. He went on to share how his early notions about "making paths for others," and being "aware of white privilege" came out of

questions about “what it [Judaism] looks like.” With respect to the large percentage of people of color in his congregation (about one-third at the time) and the absence of multiculturalism in other congregations, Rabbi Josh commented, “We’re all missing out if we don’t present ourselves with more integrity...here we have Jews of all hues.” *What did it feel like to be Jewish in what sounded like an atmosphere of pure inclusiveness*, I wondered? What followed was a series of visits, all very welcoming and positive. On one occasion, I even brought my younger sister, Chloe, and her daughter to the Passover Seder celebration; little Keziah was thrilled to find the afikoman that evening! After such a long time allowing myself to be reactionary in a way that effectively amputated half of my heritage, I stepped into the possibility of a different kind of experience and, in a sense, found my way home again.

Family

As this study drew to a close it became evident to me that *family* had emerged as a significant element among the themes. It was not something I had expected, and wondered whether and how I should address it. Early on in my research on the narrative approach I had come across a group of researchers – Fivush, Habermas, Waters, and Zaman (2011) – who had looked at identity narratives in the context of family. They claimed that for the purposes of identity development our life narratives are a critical component; that it goes beyond what we know as merely particular memories. They went on to state that “with the advent of the life story in early adolescence, the development of autobiographical remembering and narrating merges with the development of an understanding of personal identity or personhood... the life story defines who the narrator claims to be” (p. 328). This explained quite clearly how, as I took in my world and my interactions with the events surrounding me, I developed my personhood and my personal narrative. Quite naturally, as one among multiple siblings, that narrative would

include the many influences I received from their perceptions and our related discussions. Over time I also understood how my narrative began to unfold (or perhaps morph) in a way that intersected with that of my mother.

Fivush, Habermas, Waters, and Zaman (2011) describe the impact of close family members with whom the child identifies on identity development: “stories of the past that were not personally experienced may...provide a framework from which one can understand one’s personal experiences” (p. 338). Could this new discovery, along with my pre-adolescent learning of the Holocaust through my mother, for example, provide some insight as to why I feel so connected to *her* past?

Here, I make no attempt to provide insightful answers to questions surrounding my family; such insights would not be at all academic. I can say only that my *beingness* in this world is, and has been, deeply tied to my mother, my son, and my beloved brothers and sisters and their spouses and children. They are what brought me home and what keep me here.

LGBT Issues

My expectation was that this theme would have more prominence in my study. I wonder if the fact that it did not might be related to its lack of prominence in my own everyday life: I live and work in a largely (often seemingly altogether) heterosexual world. The LGBT issues which sparked this study and which were described in the initial pages were accentuated in that context for all of the reasons I described: specifically, the complex levels of homophobia within an environment entrenchment in heteronormativity. I believe now, as I did then, that educational institutions—certainly on the basis of civil rights laws, if nothing else—must be inclusive of the multiplicity of identities within its walls. Are we really providing equal access to an education when, due to the lack of tolerance, students (or their parents, spouses, or siblings) are condemned

for identifying as LGBTQQIA? And are we not presenting a skewed and wholly unrealistic worldview to those same students when we pretend that their teachers could never be anything but heterosexual?

As the idea of nation-wide same-sex marriage takes hold and becomes mundane (what a notion), people may assume that LGBT issues are a thing of the past (similar, perhaps, to the idea of a “post-racial” society with the election of Obama). But we know that is, and would be, an incorrect assumption. Even when there are public examples (i.e., the “out” principal highlighted in the Marietta Daily Journal) that show evidence that we are moving in the right direction, we have miles to go before this is a non-issue. Finally, although the ruling on same-sex marriage has extended naturally (as a progression of basic legality) into health benefits for spouses in same-sex marriages (see Appendix H) other rights, particularly around employment protections for teachers, are still non-existent. Evan Wolfson and Mary Bonauto (end of Chapter IV) have spoken about these unresolved LGBT issues as a continuing focus for action and activism.

Implications for Multiple Contexts

Instruction

I view *identity* from a very personal perspective, and have the luxury of using the long lens of my life through which I have found resolution where necessary. What, then, can be learned from my narrative to advance a pedagogical understanding around Othering? In a discussion of identity that addresses the understanding that teachers bring all of who they are to bear on their pedagogical beliefs and practices, Cummins (2001) states, “identities are negotiated in the interactions between educators and students” (p. 651). We know this is true: all we need do is recall a past moment when we walked into a brand new classroom for the first time. Maybe

the teacher saw you – and all you had to bring to bear on your educational experience. Or maybe she didn't. I would argue that on the classroom level the most direct and accessible channel for creating equity—or at least its associated discourse—is through literature. I base this observation largely on reflections of my own interactions with and immersion in a rich literary experience from an early age.

My mother exposed me to stories in multiple genres from every corner of the world. At home what I read held a mirror up to my multicultural face. In the red brick building that was P.S. 80, where I spent my years in elementary school that was rarely the case. Instead, I was whisked away each morning to Main Street, USA, and perfectly manicured tree-lined streets where frolicking in their blue and pink outfits were *Dick and Jane*. Jane looked nothing like me. Neither did her sister, Sally (though she did have dark brown hair). Much like the paintings and sculptures my mother exposed us to in the museums of New York City, books were always my window to what lay beyond my own reality. And as I matured and my view of the world expanded, I realized that someone else's words could also be a reflection of my own private inner world. I cannot help but wonder how my early school diet of *Dick and Jane* helped to shape my view of the world. Being taken daily to the place where *Dick and Jane* “lived,” I recall feeling it was a place I *should* want to be. Yet, I don't recall ever feeling *invited* to that pristine street with white picket fences. And as I reflect on that experience it occurs to me that my elementary school basal reader series was, quite possibly, my first introduction to an understanding of exclusion.

The freedom that teachers possess with respect to the literature they provide to their students (in and outside of the boundaries of the curriculum) is almost limitless. Students in every classroom have a right to be captivated, nurtured and certainly *reflected* in the literature to

which they are exposed. Malcolm X's Harlem, Gertrude Stein's Paris, and Frida Kahlo's Mexico should never be off limits because of one teacher's bias around race, sexual orientation or issues of cultural and linguistic diversity. By the same token, teachers must find creative ways to infuse the curriculum with surprising elements that will remain with the student forever. I shall never forget when my fifth grade teacher (whose skin was the same color as mine, and who wore her graying hair in thick twists behind her head), in her lesson about apartheid, brought in a 33 LP album and played it on the portable record player. The clicks and rhythms coming from Miriam Makeba went through me like electricity, and I never wanted that music to stop! And in many ways, I guess it hasn't.

On a more personal note I would challenge all teachers, but particularly new ones (who may be more malleable in their thinking) to ask themselves how *they* would like to be identified. Then, if they feel the need to impose an identity on the student (or adult) seated before them *that* is the identity (the one they would use for themselves) they should impose. I say this because it will likely be the safest, kindest, and least damaging way to view the person.

To understand the alternative, I am reminded of the poignant words of W. E. B. Du Bois (1903/1969), from "The Souls of Black Folk." In today's diverse classrooms, we can add to this writer's designations of "American" and "Negro" any of the cultural, racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, or linguistic variations that are present.

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 45)

This is truly not the child we want sitting before us, is it? There is far too much pain present for good learning to take place. And we certainly don't want to be the one who has had a hand in creating such a level of dissonance. However, if you see this child, help the child to see himself or herself through his or her own unjaded eyes.

Policy

Schools should not be sites where silence and fear run rampant at the expense of students, as well as teachers, being able to rely on these educational institutions as spaces where safety and respect are the norms. In addressing LGBT issues, Mayo (2008) finds that among adults in school settings, fear is a barrier that is not easily overcome. His suggestion is to break the silence by “engaging in conversations...sharing information about those who share similar challenges” (p. 2).

To those who make policy, I would say that the identity impositions I have experienced as a child and young adult in and outside of educational institutions have helped to shape my positionality around pedagogy. I have seen the underbelly of immigration in the world and in my classrooms—being with children who desire access to English for the fundamental purpose of using their voice for discourse. I have seen gender performativity (Butler, 2009) by children in schools and classrooms where I have taught—facing adults who did not understand the language of understanding, or worse, knew only the language of reproach. These experiences and observations have contributed to my awareness of the importance of providing access.

On a practical level, I offer two suggestions for policy. The first has to do with training, within the significant area of professional development. When it comes to LGBT issues, all facets of school personnel—from district leaders to custodians—who have the capacity to be

trained to act as advocates or allies for LGBT students and adults in K-12 schools should be.

Blackburn & McCready (2009) offer the following views on training:

Trainings should include education about particular populations in the school and the stances taken on homosexuality and gender expression within these populations. In other words, notions of right and wrong should be rejected and replaced with complicated ideas that recognize multiplicity and variability within the school community. Resources should be available in the languages spoken by the various student populations within the school, and they should represent diverse peoples and communities. (p. 229)

As evidenced by these comments, CLD is a clear and present consideration—as it should be.

My second suggestion centers on data and the way schools ought to collect, analyze, and utilize data for purposes of school improvement. In their *Data Coach's Guide*, Love, Stiles, Mundry, and DiRanna (2008) are explicit in both how they call for schools to approach data, and for the reasons behind their urgency, stating

issues of race/ethnicity, class, culture, gender, and other differences among people cannot and, more importantly, should not be avoided when examining data...responses and reactions to these differences deeply affect how we interpret data and have a profound impact on student learning. (p. 92)

They go on to explain the importance of teachers taking stock of their own biases prior to engaging in data collection; they provide practical tools for self-reflection, managing meetings, and other relevant considerations.

Policy makers need not have my first-hand knowledge of the impact of closed doors and closed minds to understand that educational access on every possible level should never be

withheld on the basis of structural or individual bias. What policy makers do need to foster respect as a norm in our educational institutions is respect for the knowledge that each of us brings to our educational experience, because we are all part of the equation of learning. Tolerance for social injustice should have no place in education.

Research

As I embarked on this autoethnographic journey I discovered a rich diversity of approaches to this pioneer in qualitative research. The frustration I initially experienced as a result of being unable to pin down a consistent model to follow, gave way to a feeling of liberation as I formed a deeper practical understanding about the process of what I was doing. And that was, essentially, the key: the *process*. When Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) described autoethnography they proposed the following: “Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience... [using] tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography” (1).

How we tell our stories, of course, is distinctly personal. That includes imagining the ways we want our readers to interact with the material—our words, photographs, personal notes and letters, and yes, even our intentions. There is a great freedom inherent in the methodology of autoethnography. And I believe as more researchers venture into this intimately reflexive narrative world to tell their stories, we will all learn more about how the process takes shape. I have strived to maintain a commitment to my own process of reflexivity throughout this work as I understand how dialogue together with *self*-conscious reflexivity that is intentional can lead to meaningful social action (Cunliffe, 2004; Johnson, 2009). It is important that teachers know that reflexivity—a teachable skill—is essential to understanding our experiences as socially

constructed, an element that supports our engagement with our social world and the kinds of practices that can lead to critical change. I hope that through my writing of *Teaching While Lesbian* I have added to the conversation about how that can happen.

Conclusion

The significance of this study was couched in the notion of creating access to spaces for meaningful expression. My aim was to shine a light upon my own ways of identifying—through the use of the reflexive narrative—in the hope that the reader could glean within my story that which would resonate with her or him. Out of a deeper understanding of how our experiences are socially constructed maybe a new level of engagement with our world would emerge, along with the kinds of practices that can lead to critical change. Speaking to the overarching theme of social justice, Sheppard and Mayo (2013) draw on Two Spirit traditions when they call on us to acknowledge and respect the multiple ways people identify; there exists strength in multiplicity. And within that understanding, we should “look for possible spaces of inclusion, rather than exclusion” (260).

Any kind of exclusion – on the basis of race, religion, sexual orientation, or even political affiliation – results in loss for someone, or everyone. Any message that announces ‘*you are not welcome here*’ carries a great deal of weight for adults and children alike. That message (often insidious) is one that happens far too frequently in places where it shouldn’t: our schools. What are we teaching? What are we learning, and what haven’t we learned? Why are we choosing the path of exclusion? Why, when we know so well that everyone has the right to walk through the door and be received for who they are?

Why not instead find the dignity that exists on the other side of every intolerant action?

The same dignity that was so clearly established in the SCOTUS (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015) decision. Dignity ran through it like a river, and if there is anything we can learn from that it is that love may very well be the greatest force in nature. It exists in every possibility. Why would anyone want to exert their energy to push against it?

I can only hope that the level of truth I have offered within this writing might move the needle of our individual moral imperative and our human inclination for humane and loving interactions in the direction it needs to go.

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APPENDIX A

The Author School Years—Slightly Beyond



2nd Grade -- Age 7



In Bermuda with NBT 1968



Heading to Bard



Summer with Chloe



Bard c. 1972-1973



Pregnant with Miles 1974



My sweet boy and me

APPENDIX B

Ship's Manifest

Line 23 – Rosenfeld, Amalie* 20 years/8 months Art Student English Stateless

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
BUREAU OF IMMIGRATION

List 3

LIST OR MANIFEST OF ALIEN PASSENGERS FOR THE UNITED STATES

ALL ALIENS arriving at a port of continental United States from a foreign port or a port of the insular possessions of the United States, and all aliens arriving at a port of said insular possessions from a foreign port, a port of continental United States, or a port of the insular possessions of the United States, shall file with the collector of customs at such port a manifest of passengers and crew, and a manifest of cargo, in accordance with the provisions of the Act of October 3, 1917, and the Act of October 3, 1917, as amended.

S. S. "ROSE SCOTIA" Passengers sailing from LIVERPOOL, ENGL. DEPARTURE, 1940

No. of List	Full Name	Age	Sex	Occupation	Country of Birth	Place of Birth	Port of Origin	Date of Departure	Place of Destination	Remarks	
1	MEHRTZ, ELISE P.	31	F	Teacher	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21007	London 9.1.40.	England London
2	MEHRTZ, ANNE	45	F	Surgeon	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Frankfurt/M.	21081	London 9.1.40.	Eng. Wellinghausen
3	MERL, ERIC	60	M	Worker	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	17736	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
4	MEHRTZ, ANNE	20	F	Housewife	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21080	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
5	MEHRTZ, ANNE	26	F	Housewife	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21080	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
6	MEHRTZ, ANNE	7	F	Housewife	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21081	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
7	MEHRTZ, ANNE	4	F	Housewife	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21080	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
8	MEHRTZ, ANNE	47	F	Teacher	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21080	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
9	MEHRTZ, ANNE	70	F	Housewife	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21080	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
10	MEHRTZ, ANNE	40	F	Housewife	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21080	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
11	MEHRTZ, ANNE	44	F	Housewife	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21080	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
12	MEHRTZ, ANNE	41	F	Housewife	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21080	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
13	MEHRTZ, ANNE	54	F	Housewife	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21080	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
14	MEHRTZ, ANNE	58	F	Housewife	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21080	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
15	MEHRTZ, ANNE	46	F	Housewife	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21080	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
16	MEHRTZ, ANNE	47	F	Housewife	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21080	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
17	MEHRTZ, ANNE	12	F	Student	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21080	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
18	MEHRTZ, ANNE	26	F	Housewife	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21080	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
19	MEHRTZ, ANNE	47	F	Housewife	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21080	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
20	MEHRTZ, ANNE	35	F	Housewife	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21080	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
21	MEHRTZ, ANNE	15	F	Student	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21080	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
22	MEHRTZ, ANNE	19	F	Student	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21080	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
23	MEHRTZ, ANNE	20	F	Student	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21080	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
24	MEHRTZ, ANNE	28	F	Student	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21080	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
25	MEHRTZ, ANNE	47	F	Housewife	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21080	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
26	MEHRTZ, ANNE	19	F	Student	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21080	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
27	MEHRTZ, ANNE	18	F	Student	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21080	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
28	MEHRTZ, ANNE	48	F	Housewife	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21080	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
29	MEHRTZ, ANNE	31	F	Housewife	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21080	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London
30	MEHRTZ, ANNE	21	F	Housewife	Yes English	Yes	Germany	Hamburg	21080	London 9.1.40.	Eng. London

AR 1 Y ALIENS 074

Total passengers 30
U.S. citizens 0
Alien 30

Mama's documents [for boarding this ship] were issued (in London) on May 1, 1940. This manifest shows that she claimed she was "stateless," the most profound discovery for me. *Mimi was my mother's middle name, and the one she used throughout her life.

APPENDIX C

Defining Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity and inclusion involves an intentional and active commitment to embrace difference and create a sense of belonging for the purpose of expanding knowledge; educating capable citizens and workers; encouraging self-actualization; and serving local, state, national, and international communities. Creating and achieving diversity and inclusion involves a commitment to educational equity, cross-cultural understanding, and the creation of respectful, open communities. Creating a welcoming and inclusive university requires more than tolerance, acknowledgement of differences, or awareness of others. Diversity and inclusion require intentional dispositions and practices:

- Studying and understanding the interrelationships between societies, cultures, and natural environments.
- Holding mutual respect and understanding for one's own lived experiences and others whose lived experiences and perceptions differ from one's own.
- Recognizing that diversity is not only representation but also involves ways of knowing and being.
- Understanding that cultural, institutional, and personal discrimination creates and sustains unearned privileges for some individuals and groups and concomitant undeserved disadvantages for other individuals and groups.
- Concentrating on dismantling policies and practices that perpetuate discrimination while simultaneously developing policies and practices that support equality and belonging.
- Creating and sustaining communities across and from our differences that enable faculty, staff, students, and other stakeholders to continually work to end all forms of discrimination.

Academic excellence is grounded in campus environments and intellectual conditions that affirm the dispositions and practices described above. Diversity and inclusion are crucial to the intellectual vitality of any college or university. It is through freedom of exchange over different perceptions, experiences, beliefs, and ways of knowing in safe, supportive, and nurturing environments that individuals develop the critical thinking, citizenship, and leadership skills that will benefit them throughout their lives. Diversity and inclusion engenders academic engagement where teaching, working, learning, and living take place in pluralistic communities of mutual respect.

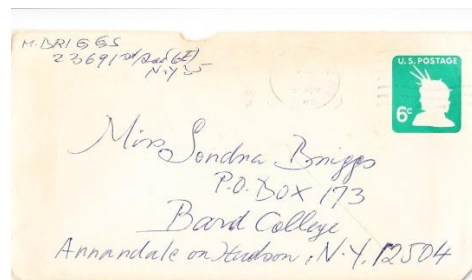
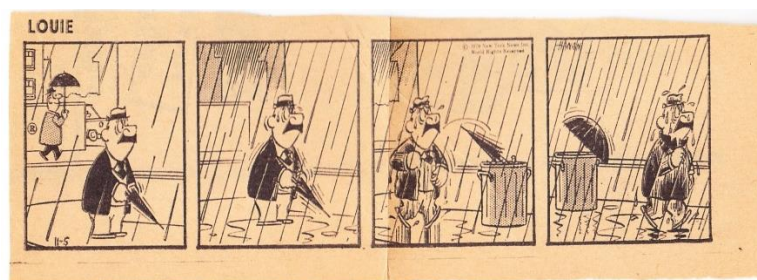
From: Kennesaw State University Office of Diversity and Inclusion

<http://www.kennesaw.edu/diversity/defining-diversity.php>

APPENDIX D

Personal Letter 1 – Mama

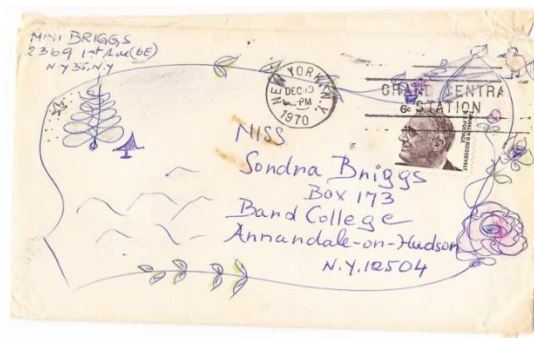
a celebration in N.B.T. last Sunday.
 A man from Swaziland was there
 with a funpiece on his head a
 wooden spear and material
 thrown over his shoulder.
 there was also a Bazaar. Nothing
 unusual. A drummen drummed
 first all the fellows starting dancing
 then the girls.
 Originally you were supposed
 to come Nov. 8. Are you Susie?
 I went to see a movie, James
 Earl Jones in "The Great White Hope"
 I loved it.
 I am getting' sightin' even
 at the Louis cartoons. I concentrate



This letter from Mama is postmarked 5 Nov 1970. In it, she describes her attendance at an NBT celebration, and her positive reaction to the movie, "The Great White Hope." My mother loved the *Louie* comic strips, but often needed help deciphering them; she regularly included them in the letters she sent to me.

APPENDIX E

Personal Letter 2 – Mama



Last night Wednesday Brenda
 called and told me that her
 landlady had been threatened with
 leaving the house Brenda lives
 in burned down "if that nigger
 does not get out" The landlady
 told Brenda last year she rented
 to a negro couple and somebody
 poisoned her daughter's dog + put
 a fire on the lawn.
 must be a close (Klu Klux Klan
 neighbor)
 Today Brenda called back

Mama began this letter [postmark 10 Dec 1970] with, "Hi Sus! Latest News." News from home was always a story, but this one was more dramatic and far more troubling than usual. My sister Brenda was living in Ozone Park, Queens at the time. Mama's mention of the Klu [sic] Klux Klan was telling for that time and place.

APPENDIX F

Personal Letter – Daisy Aldan

Should you ever feel like playing hockey, and can afford it, take one of those inexpensive Air trips of seven days to Switzerland and come spend them with me. I don't promise you a beach house with turquoise water, but perhaps a few days in the Alps.

In any case, let me hear from you.

Love,

I've just finished verses for the Zodiac I wrote here. Here's yours:

Virgo

Over the fields where Virgo bore her children,
mists rise. She winds in her multi-colored kites
and waves goodbye to restive flocking birds.

There are sunsets when the sky sings a swan-song,
then lets fall its flames onto the trees
who quiver. Scarecrows shiver. Thunder!

Lightning levels the sulphurous dragons of summer:
Virgo spirals inward and drops her seed.

This is the end of a letter from Daisy Aldan dated Jan 24, 1974. It is typed on onion skin paper and lives in an envelope containing her other correspondences to me. That envelope is postmarked 23 Dec 1971. Every handwritten letter and card from her, even envelopes, she penned in turquoise ink. In the top paragraph she is referencing a dream I shared with her (that she analyzed earlier in the letter). This section is significant because of the poem, and the reference to astrology. It's something she and my mother had in common; Mama also did Tarot cards. And before we'd go on a date, she would often read tea leaves for my sisters and me.

APPENDIX G

Home is Where the Love Is



Left to Right: (1) Miles with Fred (who is walking like a robot) in Hansville, WA. c. 1999

(2) Miles visited me in CA six months after my move; taken in Century City, Dec 1997

(3) Nonnine and Milo (a sweet connection) in Santa Fe. We were heading back to Atlanta in 2001

Fred and Miles have always had a wonderful relationship. When Milo was in elementary school, both Fred and I were living in Brooklyn; the two formed a lasting bond. Miles stayed with me in Long Beach for a few months two years into my move. We flew up to Seattle and spent time with Fred in Buck Lake Park, and on the rocky beaches—a trip that was spiritually cleansing. Miles and my sister, Nonnine, have always “dug” one another, and I’m so pleased about that! In June of 2001, Milo flew to Long Beach again, this time to help me drive cross country – back to Atlanta. I was returning with my girlfriend, our dog Sophie, and my cat Raina. About a year later there was clarity about why I had returned: Miles met his lovely wife, Hanna. Then, a little more than 10 years later, a new member of the family—my grandson, Tafari. In January 2016, Miles and Hanna will welcome their second child.

APPENDIX H

SHBP: After Same-Sex Ruling



State Health Benefit Plan Same-Sex Marriage Law Frequently Asked Questions July 8, 2015

1. How does the recent Supreme Court ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges* on same-sex marriage effect the State Health Benefit Plan (SHBP)?

As a result of the Supreme Court's ruling, SHBP members and eligible persons who are legally married may add their spouses regardless of their gender, in accordance with the eligibility requirements.

2. What are the eligibility requirements for adding same-sex spouses legally married on or after June 26, 2015 to SHBP coverage?

SHBP members or eligible persons who legally marry on or after June 26, 2015 may add their same-sex spouse within 31 days of the qualifying event.

3. Do the same eligibility rules apply to same-sex couples legally married in another state?

Yes. If current SHBP members were legally married in another state prior to June 26, 2015, these members will have until September 1, 2015 to add their same-sex spouse. These members can choose to have coverage effective as of: 1) June 26, 2015 and pay the first premium for the month of June, or 2) July 1, 2015 and pay the first premium for the month of July.

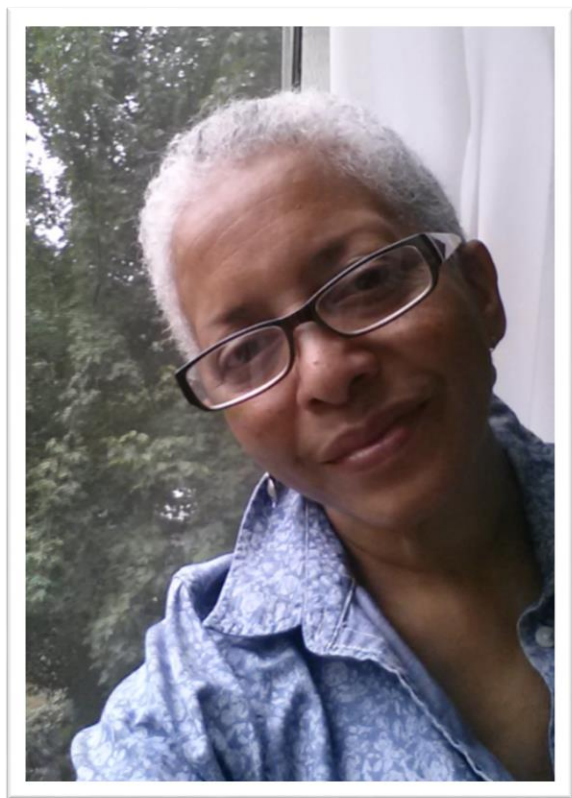
Newly eligible persons (e.g., new hires) who were legally married prior to June 26, 2015 may add their same-sex spouse within 31 days of the date of hire or qualifying event. For the effective date of coverage, please see the Eligibility and Enrollment Provisions posted on DCH's website at <http://dch.georgia.gov/shbp-plan-documents>.

4. How do I add my same-sex spouse?

SHBP is implementing programming changes to allow members to add same-sex spouses through the ADP portal at www.mySHBPga.adp.com and these changes are expected to be completed by mid-July. However, should covered members wish to add a same-sex spouse prior to this time, they can do so by calling SHBP Member Services Center at 800-610-1863 and speaking with a customer service representative.

APPENDIX I

The Author



Thank you for your engagement with this work. *Sondra*